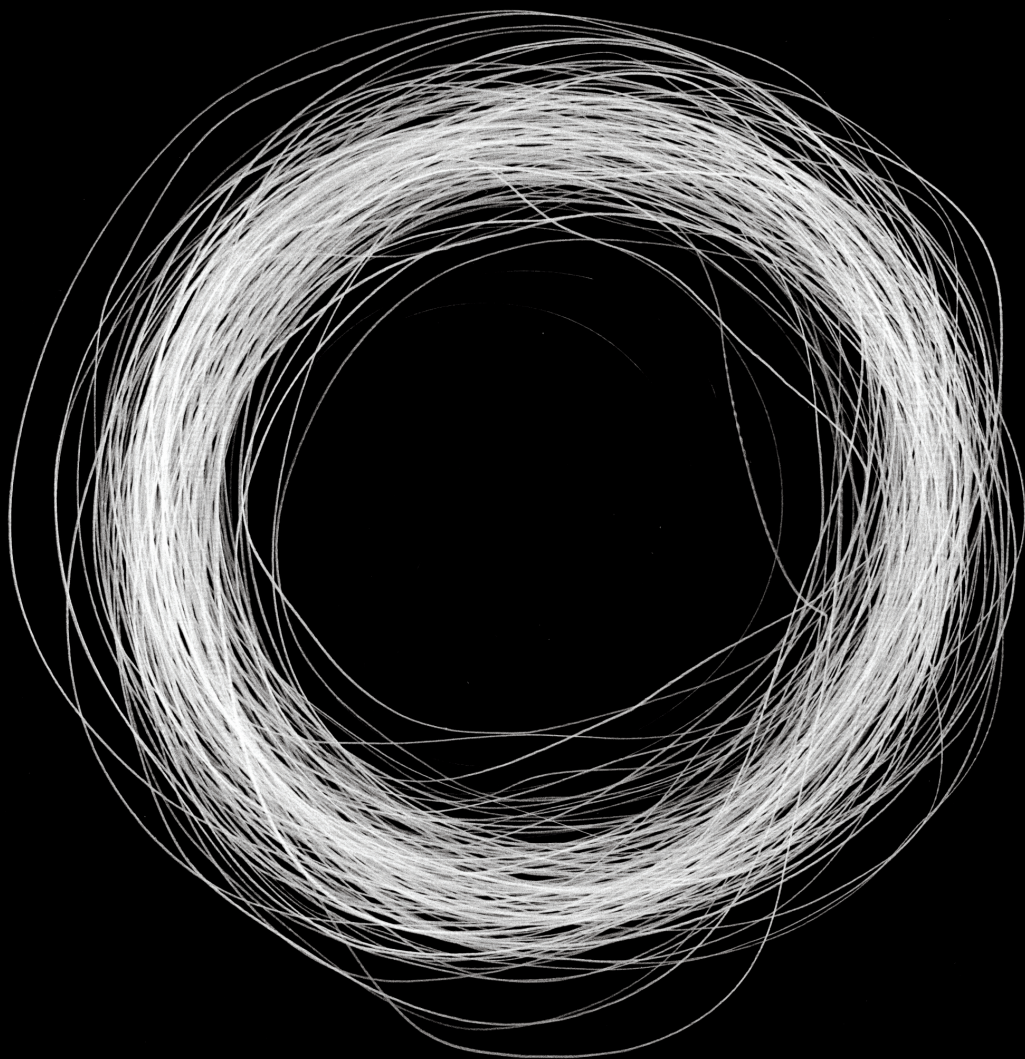


IDEOLOGICAL STORMS

INTELLECTUALS, DICTATORS, AND
THE TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION



Edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob

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*Intellectuals, Dictators,
and the Totalitarian Temptation*

Edited by
VLADIMIR TISMANEANU
and
BOGDAN C. IACOB



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VLADIMIR TISMANEANU AND BOGDAN C. IACOB

Introduction

On November 25, 2016, Fidel Castro, Cuba's dictator and symbol of *tiermondisme* since the sixties, died. Expectedly, his passing triggered a plethora of reactions varying from accolades about his revolutionary ideals and social reforms to condemnations of his regime's repression and abuses. Sean Jacobs, professor at the New School in New York, pointed out the paradox of Cuban internationalism: it was deeply mired in Cold War politics, but it had a crucial role in the success of liberation movements in Africa, thus aiding the collapse of (neo)colonial regimes on the continent.¹ Others emphatically called his rule a betrayal of the principles of the left. Or, as one editorialist stated: "we cannot afford to argue the toss about dictators. . . . Refusing to decry dictatorship is self-indulgence: it is helping the enemy."² Earlier that month, Donald Trump, an unabashed populist with a long track record of racist and sexist attitudes as well as dictatorial appetites became President of the United States. A few days into the life of Trump's new administration, in January 2017, one of his most trusted advisers advocated the idea of "alternative facts," triggering an upsurge in sales of George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*.³

¹ Sean Jacobs, "To So Many Africans, Fidel Castro Is a Hero. Here's Why," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/comment-isfree/2016/nov/30/africa-fidel-castro-nelson-mandela-cuba>).

² Zoe Williams, "Forget Fidel Castro's Policies. What Matters Is That He Was a Dictator," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/27/fidel-castro-policies-dictator>).

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/24/george-orwell-1984-sales-surge-kellyanne-conway-alternative-facts>).

These events combined with the rise of the extreme right in Europe, the vote for Brexit in the UK, the continuous threat of Islamic terrorism as well as Putin's and China's challenge to liberal democracy make the reassessment of ideological storms of the twentieth century and dreams of total power an urgent task. Such recourse seems imperative so that we would not relapse to fateful, atrocious histories. At the center of these lessons from the past lie intellectuals and the perils of their political engagement.⁴ The past one hundred years or so is filled with tales of totalitarian projects, philotyrannical destinies, ideological apostasies, and courageous—though often isolated—defenses of freedom and justice. Many intellectuals who indulged in totalitarian temptations, “believed, with absolute sincerity, that the world turned on what they said,” thus showing a pathological narcissism that was only equaled by self-hatred and often altruism.⁵ The present collection of studies wishes to revisit some of these cases and stories. It takes advantage of considerable historiographical progress in the field and of newly declassified archives. It counts among its authors scholars who have written some of the definitive studies in the fields of history of dictatorship and comparative study of ideologies. Though predominantly embedded in Europe, the book perseveres in achieving a global scope as contributors address cases and topics from Latin America, the Middle East, or China.

In 2000, Indian public intellectual Shiv Visvanathan wondered in an editorial: “How does one look at the twentieth century?”⁶ Europe's story is of a tortuous journey through modernity, from catastrophe to restoring civility, from infatuation with ideology to reluctant renunciation of imperial visions of the world. On a global level, the picture that emerges is of perpetual turbulence, confirming Hannah Arendt's description of the past century as one of ideological storms. The demise of the highly optimistic liberal expectations embodied in pre-1914 visions of perpetual peace and social reformism led to attempts

⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, “Why Orwell Matters,” *Hoover Digest*, October 30, 2001 (<http://www.hoover.org/research/why-orwell-matters>).

⁵ Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.

⁶ Quoted by Konrad Jarausch, *Out of Ashes. A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 775.

to transcend existing orders and build totally integrated communities founded on galvanizing myths of class and race warfare. These menacing political imaginaries have their origin in the inextricable link between war and revolution in the twentieth century. What before 1914 was a symptom of the difficult path to turning modern, after 1918, it grew into a universally felt malaise rooted in the contestation of established social and political values. Combined with rapid democratization, massification, nation-state building, and empire collapse, this destabilization of the status quo fuelled the crystallization of new political and cultural radicalisms. World War II consolidated and expanded beyond previously imaginable limits the export of socio-political models through massive state violence.⁷ The embrace of ethnic (or racial) and, respectively, social utopias combined with massively interventionist state practices generated sweeping, violently transformational systems of ideas that wished to found new men and women, societies and global orders. Since the 1930s well until the late 1980s, as radical movements took over states and established regimes of violence, persecution, exclusion, and extermination, ideology gripped the masses through belief and osmosis.

Generations of intellectuals hastened to annihilate their dignity in an apocalyptic race for ultimate certitudes on either side of the political spectrum. Interwar radicalisms and their post-1945 avatars offered a heroic ethos. Countless individuals were ready to die for it. The will to believe prevailed over the will to reason. Seduction buried critical faculties. The entire heritage of Western skeptical rationalism was easily dismissed in the name of the revealed light emanating from the different revolutionary circles expounding salvific dreams founded upon the all-out transformation of human society. The Revolution (either from the left or the right) was idealized into a cathartic event, the advent of a new age of justice and international order. Ideological claims of scientific infallibility were added into the mix. Thus came about gnostic visions that explained history and society in almost geometric formulas.

⁷ Timothy Snyder, "Introduction. Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953," in *Stalin and Europe. Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953*, ed. by Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–17.

Post-1945, in the context of the war raging in Korea and generalized engagement in the Cold War, Stalin left a difficult legacy on the world that emerged out of World War II. According to historian Robert Gellately, “in the end, he was convinced, the only way to be rid of war was to eliminate its cause—capitalism. Stalin’s faith in the inevitable clash and war with the capitalists remained unshaken.”⁸ In his engagement with Europe during the interwar, war, and postwar periods, Stalin bequeathed this legacy of inevitable ideological and geopolitical conflict that, despite post-1953 evolutions, remained the ultimate reason for the division of the continent until 1989. The new global ideological setting of the world combined with the continuous search, mainly outside Europe, for new revolutionary causes sustained the blindness of many intellectuals founded in a love of determinism in an age of extremes. Moreover, *tier-mondisme* preserved the illusion that “the ‘wretched of the earth’ were the bearers of a future socialist utopia.”⁹ Or, as one authored remarked, the ideas of revolution and alternative modernity were more enduring in the non-European world because of the persistence of underdevelopment, the legacies of Western colonialism, armed struggle, and civil wars.¹⁰

At the same time, the intellectual history of the twentieth century can be written as a series of political disenchantments with doctrines that promised universal emancipation or national rebirth, but led instead to terror, injustice, inequality, and abysmal human rights abuses. The twilight of *grand récits* is, at least in its implications, a grandiose *fin de partie*: we see the final agony of a hopeless attempt to overcome the limits of human nature by imagining a total break with “History.” Either from the left or the right, the horrors of the twentieth century came about once “modernist revitalization movements”¹¹ became full-fledged state programs of social engineering. These projects attempted to obliterate the distance between the *political* and Utopia.

⁸ Robert Gellately, *Stalin’s Curse. Battling for Communism in War and Cold War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 377.

⁹ Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason. The Intellectual Romance with Fascism: From Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁰ Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism 1917–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 319.

¹¹ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 181.

Fascism, communism, as well as various types of ethnocentric, revivalist nationalisms advocated radical anthropological projects that ended up in dictatorship if not altogether genocidal regimes. Indeed, the memory of twentieth-century democracies is one unavoidably marked and altered by the trauma of mass murder. Many times, intellectuals were central actors in these historical dramas: as decision-makers or legitimators; as victims or apostates; or, as by-standers or critics. In this context, Sydney Hook correctly underlined that “intellectual integrity became the first victim of political enthusiasm.”¹²

The yearning for an absolute reshaping of the human condition inspired frantic endeavors to transcend what appeared to be the philistine carcass of liberal institutions and values. Ideology was there to justify violence, to sacralize it, and to discard all opposite views as effete, sterile, dangerous, and fundamentally false. A fundamentally binary logic was at work: the Other was by definition not only *outsider* but an *enemy* too. Moreover, his/her potentially disturbing effect or influence on the imagined perfect order where Utopia had materialized into politics imposed exemplary solutions. The achievement of modernity was therefore premised on the plasticity of human nature and on the possibility of transforming it in accordance with a utopian blueprint. Such a radically utilitarian, transformist conception of politics ultimately materialized in the divinization of a mythical state holding the right of life and death over its subjects. In this conception, the state was beyond moral limitations, for it was the *only* producer of morality.

Despite the decline of fascism, communism, or of other revitalization movements, the utopian reservoir of humanity has not been completely exhausted. Refurbished ideologies have resurfaced, among them populism, chauvinism, and fundamentalism of different shades. The ghost of the future conjured up by young Karl Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* has been replaced by revamped specters of the past, summoned into the present by disconcerted political actors, unable to come to terms with the hardships of the democratic project and the challenges of postmodernity. A world full of dangers has come about with traditional lines of demarcation completely disintegrated. New forms of radicalism are simmering under the carapace of a pseudo sta-

¹² Quoted in Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 232.

bility seriously shaken by the financial crisis of 2008. Historical hubris has not vanished; anguishes and malaise remain and fuel new follies.

In the twentieth century, the rise of charismatic leaders and movements that monopolized power was a phenomenon directly linked to the challenges of economic and political modernity. The breakdown of empires in Europe and the collapse of the colonial system generated tensions, illusions, and fragmentation that often incurred authoritarian and violent responses with significant human cost. From totalitarianism, through military dictatorship, single-party rule, and competitive authoritarianism, to modern theocracies, our contemporary world experienced state/regime projects that aimed to control most, if not all, forms of socialization, economic production, communication, institutional development, etc.

The past is therefore littered with examples of what George Steiner called “the charismatic appeal of ‘barbaric forms.’”¹³ To better contextualize the ideological storms of the past century, the volume connects the analysis of intellectuals’ political engagements with the role of dictators that personified the dreams of totalizing life which haunted their times. How did intellectuals relate to certain dictators? Which were the factors that conditioned both tyrannical rule and its legitimization? How did different forms of institutionalization of power, influence, or support affect the general profile of various dictatorships? At the core of the present collection lies the nexus of ideological zeal and dictatorial hubris. This fateful symbiosis was the trigger for one of the defining features of the past century—exterminism. The latter has been first and foremost the expression of ideological certainties that dehumanized population groups (treated as vermin, “cockroaches,” despicable insects, superfluous, dispensable people, etc.). Their elimination could thus be presented as the path to humanity’s or the nation’s higher levels of unity and happiness.

Totalitarian leaders fancied themselves as intellectuals. Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao—they all wanted to be seen and acclaimed as philosophers. Convinced that they had a mission to purify the body politic of the “enemies of the people” and to create an earthly paradise (defined either as a classless society or as a perfectly homogenous

¹³ George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle. Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1971), 61.

racial/ethnic community), they tried to construct ideological justifications for mass murder. Almost all modern dictators were the subject, in some way or another, of personality cults. The latter reflected attempts for both consolidation and inclusion. They drew on national histories, patterns of socialization, cultural categories, and, last but not least, political traditions. The beneficiary of charisma can be a person, a party, a movement, or any combination of the three. In the case of the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik party was impersonally charismatic, while Lenin and Stalin were the incarnation of the party, its mission, and of its quality as vehicle of historical reason. In Mao's China, charisma followed a similar recipe to which the Chairman added a strong national ingredient. In Nazi Germany, loyalty belonged to the Führer as the embodiment of the pristine *völkisch* community. In other cases, such as Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal, these leaders were perceived as saviors of the nation. In Latin America, charisma was directly connected to the respective leaders' putative ability to restore order and stability through strengthening certain institutions (e.g., army, presidency, a party with visions of hegemony). In Africa or Asia, charisma was an essential ingredient for mobilizing popular support and systemic stability. It was woven into processes and transformations connected to national liberation and decolonization.

Structure

The volume avoids strict periodizations, as postwar trends, trajectories, themes, and biographies built on accounts from the interwar period. This approach is employed throughout the four sections of the book. The advantage of this approach is that it points out moments of breakage and upheaval as well as continuities across the various turning points of the twentieth century. Moreover, it provides a big picture that is favorable to comparisons, not only between cases of ideological commitment or disenchantment but also among different national or regional contexts. The authors therefore offer a multiplicity of histories within the same terrain of the twentieth century.

Part One focuses on several cases of entanglement between intellectuals and various incarnations of communism. Michael David-Fox sets the tone for this section as he examines, in continuation of his path-

breaking volume *Showcasing the Great Experiment*,¹⁴ the relationship between Stalin and interwar fellow-travelers (Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse). He shows that their assessment of the Soviet experiment was often a personalized evaluation filtered through relationships with local officials, the vision of Stalin as an intellectual in power, and the illusion of influencing him and the Revolution. David Brandenberger continues on the theme of Stalin as the “philosopher king” by exploring the Soviet leader’s involvement in the writing of the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*. The author disputes the mythologization of the dictator’s role in the creation of the *Short Course*. He compares the literature on Stalin’s alleged epic involvement in the writing of party history with the historical record itself. Brandenberger’s is a cautionary tale about critics who, in their bid to expose a dictator’s totalitarian drive, turned out themselves to have promoted an instrumental and politicized view of history.

Moving away from the figure of Stalin, Stanislao Pugliese reassesses his biography of Ignazio Silone¹⁵ in an exploration of the legacy of his destiny in Italy during the second half of the twentieth century. The author uses both Silone’s writings and biography (including controversies concerning potential collaboration with Mussolini’s secret police) to flesh out the tragedy of an intellectual that walked the path from communist commitment to apostasy. Nikos Marantzidis discusses the relationship between intellectuals in the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) through the interwar period, the World War II, and the Civil War. Employing qualitative and quantitative analysis, the author stresses that this entanglement fluctuated in close connection with international and national historical circumstances as well as with the different choices made by communist organizations and the Soviet Union. Despite eminent interwar personalities and the impressive expansion of its constituency during the occupation, in 1949, the KKE found itself bereft of significant intellectual figures, a situation that would change only during the sixties.

¹⁴ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Stanislao Pugliese, *Bitter Spring: A Life of Ignazio Silone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

Angelo Mitchievici and Bogdan C. Iacob provide two complementary chapters on Romanian intellectuals' affair with communism. Mitchievici focuses on travelers to and travelogues on the Soviet Union from the 1914 until 1960s. Iacob examines the phenomenon of socialist-patriotic palingenesis among the Romanian left in the immediate aftermath of World War II, which fuelled support for the idea of popular democracy. Mitchievici distinguishes between several types of travelogues: the journey for statistical purposes, the pilgrim's journey, and the delegate's journey. Their specificities reflect the ideological impact of the "first workers' state" as they are testimonies of the advent of a new world. The author then dwells on the intricate case of Panait Istrati, another example of an intellectual who walked the path from faith to apostasy without renouncing socialism. To differentiate between the experience of intellectuals from the East traveling to the USSR versus those from the West, Mitchievici employs for the former journeys the term *hacilik*. The term describes not only re forging oneself through witnessing the Soviet civilization, but also the crucial role of such trip in the socialization of Romanian intellectuals with the budding regime at home. Iacob adds to this story the account of how, between 1944 and 1947, both the communist party and left-wing intellectuals engaged in discourses of the nation's renewal. He looks at the overlaps between narratives of reconstruction that inextricably linked programs of social reform and de-fascization with a vision of the national body reborn out of the cauldron of war. It would be an important legacy that played a crucial role in the legitimization of Romanian communists' turn toward autonomy within the socialist camp.

Part Two comprises five studies about engagements with utopia on the basis of the fates of certain revolutionary projects. First, Paul Hollander, revisiting some of the theses of his classic *Political Pilgrims*,¹⁶ provides a sociological analysis of Western intellectuals' commitment to various dictators based on an expansive pool of cases from across the world (Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Mao, Castro, and Hugo Chávez). At the root of intellectuals' fascination with dictatorship was the profound alienation from their own societies and dissatisfaction with

¹⁶ Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

modernity and capitalism. This resulted in a feverish search for alternatives regardless of the human costs. They indulged in hero-worship and in expansive projections of ideals upon polities whose grievous fallacies they often ignored or misrepresented. Hollander reaches a conclusion that is a recurrent motif in the present collection: the examination of the relationship between dictators and intellectuals sheds far more light on the disposition of the latter than on the outlook of the dictatorships they embraced. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi reverses this perspective by focusing on the aesthetic dimensions of Mussolini's politics. The author examines the overlap between the Italian dictator's aestheticized vision of fascism and his fantasy of total control, thus shining light on the totalitarian implications of his artistic metaphors. Based on these, Mussolini stood as the omnipotent manly creator who forged himself while crafting his dramatic work of art out of feminine, inferior masses—a dream of absolute power over a militarized, unlimitedly malleable body politic.

The remaining chapters in Part Two present three cases of intellectuals who, at one point in their lives, immersed themselves in utopian fantasies, from either the right or the left. Despite significant disenchantment later in their lives, they were unable to fully extricate themselves from earlier youthful dreams. Vladimir Tismaneanu discusses the intellectual trajectory of philosopher E. M. Cioran, from his interwar affair with Romanian fascism to his torturous journey of coming to terms with the reality of liberal democracy. Cioran was a proponent of fascism as a revolutionary doctrine, a dramaturgy of absolute destruction and rebirth. After the shock of World War II, the Holocaust, and his public break with former friend Constantin Noica, Cioran confronted, maybe not as publicly as he should have, his infamous past. In the process, he created “syllogisms of bitterness” that became the expressions of his tragic humanism. Tismaneanu's essay also offers an extensive analysis of Romanian fascism and the fate of the so-called 1927 generation, providing links to its intellectual legacy during the communist regime.

Michael Scammell returns to the intellectual destiny of Arthur Koestler, the subject of his masterful biography.¹⁷ Scammell presents

¹⁷ Michael Scammell, *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009).

several loci of Koestler's thirst of utopianism. The first were ideologies—Zionism and communism. The second were his literary writings; these highlight progression in the author's thinking, as Koestler's first-hand experience with the totalitarian appetites of the twenties and thirties guided him eventually to their denunciation. The contributor concludes by pointing to Koestler's metaphysical utopianism, which since the fifties was channeled into modern science. Koestler was a mystic of the heart, who kept his belief and hope in a higher unity, the same urge that brought him to the interwar communist movement. Marius Stan examines Romanian surrealist poet Gellu Naum's relationship with communism. Stan uses this example as a means to discuss the entanglement between aesthetics and politics within the Romanian avant-garde in a European context. The author argues that the ambivalence of Naum's destiny was rooted in the dichotomy between artistic and revolutionary ideals. Naum remained an upstanding figure of international surrealism under some of the most perplexing and inimical circumstances.

Part Three takes a different route, for it investigates how mythologies of the nation fuelled, either from the left or the right, intellectuals' involvement with dictatorship in Eastern Europe. Dennis Deletant looks at the controversial, Romanian military dictator, Ion Antonescu. Deletant analyzes Antonescu's ties to fascism from the standpoint of the ideology, policies, and political alliances of his regime. Deletant looks at Antonescu's antisemitism as both personal belief and political agenda while in power. He then examines his relationship with the Iron Guard: with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the fascist movement during the National Legionary State. Lastly, he diagnoses the profile of Antonescu's regime after his cohabitation with the Iron Guard: an ultranationalist, overtly antisemitic dictatorship that was not based on a mass political party or ideology, but relied on the police and the army. His authoritarianism was less barbarous than other totalitarian states but it did have murderous consequences for hundreds of thousands of Jews and Roma, whom he deported, starved, and killed.

Vladimir Petrović builds on Deletant's study by proposing a comparative analysis of two policy papers authored by Romanian demographer Sabin Manuilă in 1941 and respectively Yugoslav historian Vasa Čubrilović in 1944. He points out the similarity of these documents

for they advocated ethnic cleansing with considerable zeal and urgency. The contribution sheds light on the conditions and circumstances which made it possible for these academics to engage in such blunt legitimization of mass repression. It pursues an overview of the urge to homogenize the national body in Yugoslavia and Romania, clarifying the intellectual genealogies within which Čubrilović and Manuilă could be situated. He then presents how such murderous dreams materialized and developed under the fog of World War II.

The subsequent two chapters switch the register by presenting intellectuals' engagements with the nation as master symbol during communism. Michal Kopeček analyzes Czech postwar debates about the national road to socialism by focusing on the writings of historian and musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý and philosopher Karel Kosík. Kosík's reconsideration of Marxism as political doctrine and philosophical approach and of its embeddedness in the Czech and Czechoslovak national context was a powerful counterpoint to Nejedlý's dogmatic national communism. The two invoked conflicting traditions and constructed divergent legitimizing national genealogies for the present. Kopeček recreates the process through which Czech intellectuals conceptually moved from the "national road" towards the "national form" during the Prague Spring. The contexts and essence of the political project in late 1940s had been considerably altered by the late 1960s.

In his turn, Cristian Vasile puts forth three examples of party intellectuals engaged in cultural policies and narratives about the Romanian nation during the communist regime. He analyzes the institutional and discursive trajectories of writer Dumitru Popescu, poet Adrian Păunescu, and art critic Mihnea Gheorghiu. They were ideologues who played central roles in Ceaușescu's cult of personality and in the regime's turn toward autochthonist and organicist policies and narratives. Vasile shows how his characters were complicit in the regimentation of local elites and in the repression of criticism against state socialism in Romania.

Part Four of the volume comprises studies that bring the reader closer to the end of the twentieth century. They tie in with contemporary issues such as the persistence of antisemitism in the West, the slow erosion of the values upon which the EU is built, the quagmire in Iraq, and China's rise in the post-Cold War era. Echoing his most

recent book,¹⁸ Jeffrey Herf investigates an often-ignored issue, namely, the German Democratic Republic's participation in the Soviet bloc's campaign of antagonism towards the state of Israel, from the mid-1960s to the end of the Cold War. This included hostile propaganda aimed at the delegitimation of Israel's right to statehood as well as international support for Arab terrorism and the rejection of Israel's right to self-defense (both state and citizenry). Herf concludes that these policies reflected a profound misrepresentation of antisemitism among postwar communist regimes. Furthermore, anti-imperialist solidarity with the Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) supposedly liberated East Germany from continuities with the Nazi past and placed it on the correct side of the global revolution. Adeed Dawisha switches the focus from Europe to the Middle East, as he insightfully overviews the characteristics and phases of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. He argues that the persistence of Saddam's rule should be explained by a multitude of factors that go beyond a unilateral focus on his reign's terror. He points to the connection between the regime's collectivism and postwar Arab nationalism; to the fact that Saddam took advantage of the country's considerable wealth in order to push social policies beneficial for Iraqi society; and, to the cult of personality, which became a ubiquitous mechanism of regimentation. Despite the hollowing out of the regime in the post-Cold War era, Iraq was a country held hostage to the will and whim of an omnipresent tyrant.

Jan-Werner Müller focuses on "Cold War liberals," who understood that the attraction of totalitarian projects came from their claims of having solutions to problems unsolvable by nineteenth-century or interwar liberalism. They formulated strategies that could make pre-1945 ideological storms less likely in the future. Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron, Norberto Bobbio, or Judith Shklar emphasized pluralism, antideterminism, negative liberty, liberal constitutionalism, and social security. They relied on historical narratives and an "ethos of dialogue" upon which such edifice could be built. Their main lesson was that the answer to the constant threat of antiliberalism was political calm and constant wariness of ideological certainties and formulae. Jeffrey

¹⁸ Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Wasserstrom discusses the ways we can assess the degree of political freedom in contemporary China. He underlines how China confounds Cold War-inspired frameworks for thinking about Communist Party-run states. He argues that judging China on a simple divide between “fear” and “free” countries ignores this society’s complexities. Though carefully describing various forms of repression or control of freedom of expression, the contributor warns about the danger of stating that systemic restrictions of liberty have not been affected by the tremendous change taking place in China in the past decades.

In the contribution concluding the volume, Mark Lilla returns to the question of the “lure of Syracuse.”¹⁹ He analyzes how political innocence acts as a basis for intellectuals’ support for tyrannical orders and totalitarian ideologies. He focuses on two archetypes: the Billy Budds, after Herman Melville’s character, and the Prince Myshkins, after Feodor Dostoyevsky’s. The Budds are as innocent as lambs, extremely useful for the tyrants of the twentieth century. When they lose their political innocence, such individuals are incapable of understanding the moral complexity of political life and the polymorphous perversity of evil. The Myshkins recognize that the world has fallen, but remain resolute in their belief in overcoming this fall. Therefore, good politics is missionary activity and the revolution is a beacon traveling across the world fuelling hope. He ends the essay and implicitly the collection on a pessimistic note: the innocents have learned nothing; they still argue that liberty and justice can be brought anywhere. He focusses on the Arab Spring as a salient example. Presciently, because his chapter was written in 2011, he warns that that a despot toppled by revolution might open the path towards an even worse dictatorship. The case of Egypt vindicates such foreboding. His advice, echoing the general line of the collection, is that when thinking about change and progress we ought to hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. The result of the presidential elections in the United States validate this vantage point.

¹⁹ Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind. Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 193–216.

New Authoritarianism

The end of communism provided a model for peaceful, democratic revolution and represented a paradigmatic case for the centrality of human rights. It triggered the end of the Cold War, thus becoming “an enabling moment,” “removing a roadblock to globalization, ending traditional colonialism, and permitting Eastern Europe to enter post-history.”²⁰ And, last but not least, the events of 1989 cautioned autocrats against both complacency in systemic malaise and overenthusiastic reform. For instance, China chose to pursue economic reform without following similarly extensive political liberalization in contrast to Gorbachev’s recipe for change.²¹ Simultaneously, the expectations raised by the exhilaration of the early post-Cold War years have often been betrayed or rebuked, as postrevolutionary aftermaths were bogged down into new authoritarianisms. There was a naïveté (or all-out ignorance) concerning the local possibilities and conditions for immediate transition to and consolidation of democracy. What followed in the past decade or so, colored revolutions, the Arab Spring, the rise of the extreme right wing in Europe, Brexit, and Donald Trump’s electoral victory only confirmed the premature nature of earlier fantasies about a “global democratic revolution.” Timothy Garton Ash judiciously underlined that “it seems plausible to suggest that the financial crisis of 2008-2009 . . . has initiated a new period characterized by three larger crises: of capitalism, of democracy, and of the project of European integration.”²² Under the circumstances, we should

²⁰ Gale Stokes, “Purposes of the Past,” in *The End and the Beginning. The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History*, ed. by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 52.

²¹ According to Thomas P. Bernstein, “Gorbachev aimed at fundamental reforms in three different sectors: the economy, the military-industrial complex and foreign policy, and the political system.” See his “Resilience and Collapse in China and the Soviet Union,” in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse. Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, ed. Martin K. Dimitrov (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44.

²² Timothy Garton Ash, “Is Europe Disintegrating?” *New York Review of Books*, January 19, 2017 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/01/19/is-europe-disintegrating/>).

not be surprised if a new wave of what Mussolini called “revolution of reaction”²³ sweeps contemporary societies as an expression of the tension between change and fear of degeneration, emancipation and control, mobilization and stability.

Vladimir Putin’s offensive combined with China’s impressive international showing in the context of democratic fatigue in Europe and in the US have put an end to the illusion that liberal democracy is the only game in town. In a move symbolic for the rise of populist authoritarianism, a quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orbán decided to erect a wall meant to break the refugee wave that swept Europe since 2015. Orbán’s rhetoric is not merely conservative, as some of his apologists suggest,²⁴ but rather a new form of xenophobic radicalism that Peter Viereck diagnosed in 1941 as meta-politics.²⁵ The new authoritarians express political anger, moral outrage, and apocalyptical expectations for an immediate break with the status quo. The Law and Justice (PiS) government formed in Poland in 2015²⁶ has merged traditional *Endecja* (Roman Dmowski’s interwar integral nationalist party) aspirations and goals with an emphasis on deep seated, traditionalist Catholic values, the latter often reflecting a pre-Vatican II *Weltanschauung*.²⁷

Antiliberalism, collectivism, and staunch anti-intellectualism blend together in resurgent discourses of national self-aggrandizement. They seek to create new communities of feeling and faith. Based on his extensive research worldwide, from Moscow to Kuala Lumpur and from Caracas to Beijing, journalist William Dobson reached an instructive conclusion about the nature of contemporary authoritarians: “Today’s dictators

²³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996), 8.

²⁴ Tibor Fischer, “Viktor Orbán is no fascist: he’s David Cameron’s best chance at EU reform,” *The Telegraph*, January 7, 2016 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/hungary/12086883/Viktor-Orban-is-no-fascist-hes-David-Camerons-best-chance-at-EU-reform.html>).

²⁵ Peter Viereck, *Meta-politics: The Roots of the Nazi Mind* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965).

²⁶ R. Daniel Kelemen and Mitchell A. Orenstein, “Europe’s Autocracy Problem,” in *Foreign Affairs*, January 7, 2016 (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/poland/2016-01-07/europes-autocracy-problem>).

²⁷ David Ost, “Regime Change in Poland, Carried Out From Within,” *The Nation*, January 8, 2016.

and authoritarians are far more sophisticated, savvy, and nimble than they once were. Faced with growing pressures, the smartest among them neither hardened their regimes into police states nor closed themselves off from the world; instead, they learned and adapted. For dozens of authoritarian regimes, the challenge posed by democracy's advance led to experimentation, creativity, and cunning. Modern authoritarians have successfully honed new techniques, methods, and formulas for preserving power, refashioning dictatorship for the modern age."²⁸ In fact, as Dobson points out, such "modern dictators understand it is better to appear to win a contested election than to openly steal it."²⁹ Their regimes are not democracies, to be sure, yet they are not traditional autocracies either. Political scientist Karen Dawisha has aptly called them electocracies.³⁰ In 2002, Andreas Schedler already indicated that authoritarian states that hold elections with "some" opposition were the most widespread and common species within the non-liberal political realm.³¹

Russian strongman Vladimir Putin is perhaps the paradigmatic example of the new authoritarianism that is threatening contemporary liberal democracies. He has a past and an ideology. Putin is the head of a mafia-like association of thugs, mountebanks, and experts in manipulation, often described as "political technologists." In spite of the masterfully crafted image of a "man without a face,"³² Putin is not the elusively enigmatic individual propelled by anonymous forces to the rudder of the Russian boat in one of the most turbulent periods of the country's history. Putin is the offspring of the political culture of the Soviet secret police and inherits from that constellation of passions, emotions, and phobias his political techniques and a deep contempt for individual rights.

²⁸ William J. Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy* (London: Harvill Secker, 2012), 4–5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ Karen Dawisha, "Electocracies and the Hobbesian Fishbowl of Postcommunist Politics" in *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*, ed. Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu (New York and Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), 291–305.

³¹ Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 47.

³² Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (London: Riverhead Books, 2012).

Putin sees himself as Russia's redeemer and indulges therefore in fervid fantasies of salvation. Understanding his behavior in recent years, including his repudiation of the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014 and subsequent invasion of Eastern Ukraine or the annexation of Crimea, means to grasp his authoritarian mindset, including his conviction that might creates right. His values are macho-like, militaristic, opposed to tolerance and diversity. He despises the democratic opposition (people such as the late Boris Nemtsov, Gary Kasparov, and Aleksey Navalny) and deeply distrusts initiatives from below, civil society, and Western liberalism. Helped by immensely cynical operators like Sergey Markov and Vladislav Surkov, a cult of Putin's personality has emerged as a pillar of this authoritarian-kleptocratic system. The case of Russia under Putin reveals how the promise of a "dictatorship of law" evaporated into a cronyist system with an ideological camouflage reminiscent of fascism.³³ Putin resembles an amoral dictator, tone-deaf to the principles of international law. He is anti-Western and antiliberal to the core.

The mythologies of Soviet times have been restored and those who continue to insist on the atrocities of the past have been increasingly marginalized. No surprise therefore that Vyacheslav Nikonov, a political commentator with close ties to the Putin leadership, and the grandson of Stalin's Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, puts it bluntly: "People are not interested in the past. Any attempt to dig into the past evokes only irritation."³⁴ For decades, communism played the role of a secular religion, proposing the main reference points, the moral compass, for generations. Its genuine amorality was shrouded in rhetorical proclamations of equality and fraternity. Such proclamations are today looked back upon with regret by many who prefer to remember the victory over Nazi Germany rather than the horrors of the Gulag.

Aurel Kolnai, a Hungarian émigré with close links to Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club, published in 1938 the volume *The War Against the West* (New York, Viking Press). Kolnai rejected any form of democratic triumphalism and wrote bitterly about the rampant illusion

³³ Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

³⁴ David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

that a compromise could be reached with the totalitarian dictators: “We . . . are hugging the complacent belief that the essence of democracy is compromise . . . We only forget that there is a marked difference between compromise within a democracy, which presupposes the common ground of democracy accepted by all the various competing groups of the people, and compromise with the convinced and uncompromising mortal enemies of democracy.”³⁵ Such a lucid warning ought to be read by those who think that compromise with expansionist dictators or with politicians of authoritarian colors (such as Viktor Orbán, Donald Trump, and many others) can be a solution to the threats their government’s now pose to liberal democracies everywhere. It is a crucial lesson for contemporary post-Cold War, post-9/11, and allegedly post-truth societies, where the resurrection of old xenophobic ghosts has resulted in vindictive discourses of national self-aggrandizing to the detriment of dialogue, trust, and tolerance.

In the context of widespread disenchantment with political involvement, intellectuals’ potential moderation remains a crucial element of social equilibrium. It is essential to avoid mass hysteria, to recognize the need for constitutional consensus, and to foster a culture of predictable procedures. As new authoritarianism is on the rise in Europe and across the world, precarious pluralist institutions are increasingly contested and attacked. Ralf Dahrendorf poignantly argued that “where intellectuals are silent, societies have no future.”³⁶ In deeply fragmented social and public environments, nationally and internationally, the nexus of ideas and action has in no way lost its revitalizing potential as a force of freedom.

Europe’s Faustian history tainted by mass murder and exterminist utopias forced it into a chastened vision of modernity and globalization. The gist of its experience has been best expressed by German historian, Konrad Jarausch: “only when controlled by humanist ethics can the dynamic power of modernity truly become a force for good.”³⁷ Contemporary radicalisms and authoritarians should be placed under

³⁵ Quoted in Dan Stone, *The Holocaust, Fascism, and Memory. Essays in the History of Ideas* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 73.

³⁶ Ralf Dahrendorf, *After 1989: Morals, Revolution, and Civil Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 122.

³⁷ Jarausch, *Out of Ashes*, 780.

the light of an embattled century that bears the burden of mass murder perpetrated in the name of totalizing, redemptive modernities. This way the hubris of present ideological follies can come into full view. Resistance to such siren-songs would be strengthened by the knowledge of the potential devastation incumbent to fantasies of salvation. Contemporary dilemmas of a globalized world can only benefit from being discussed with fallacies of the past in mind.

Acknowledgements

The present volume is based on two conferences: “Ideological Storms: Intellectuals and the Totalitarian Temptation” (2011) and “Dreams of Total Power: Dictators and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century” (2013). These events were the last two installments in a multiyear project (started in 2007) coordinated by the Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies at the University of Maryland (College Park) in collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute. The endeavor aimed to provide, by reflecting on watershed moments, an overview of global dynamics characterizing the twentieth century and to assess its impact on the current one. A second aim was to offer a forum for young Romanian scholars to present their work and join international debates in comparative politics and history. This is why each of the volumes based on proceedings published by CEU Press comprises a cohort of texts about Romania or by Romanian authors.

The conference “Dreams of Total Power” was scheduled for the end of 2012, but this timeline collapsed once the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI), for political reasons, pulled its financial backing. The Clough Center at Boston College, through director Vlad Perju, revitalized the project. With the aid of two conveners of the previous RCI-sponsored conferences, professor Vladimir Tismaneanu and Horia-Roman Patapievici (former RCI president, forced by the socialist-liberal government to resign in 2012), the last event in the series took place in March 2013 in Boston. The editors express their gratitude to Horia-Roman Patapievici, Mircea Mihăieș (who, until 2012, was the RCI’s vice president), Christian Ostermann, and Vlad Perju for enthusiastically embracing the idea of a series of conferences on political-intellectual issues crucial for understanding the past century.

With such a tumultuous background, the present volume was long in the making. The abovementioned difficulties combined with the editors' other academic commitments delayed its completion. But the contributors and Central European University Press have maintained an unwavering belief in this collection. We are grateful for their support. The editors would also like to thank former conference participants who, because of various reasons, could not contribute to the volume. At the event in 2011, Balázs Trencsényi, Richard Wolin, and Jeffrey Isaac presented wonderful papers, while Dick Howard and Cristina Vatulescu were insightful discussants. In 2013, Holly Case, Mark Kramer, Constantin Iordachi, and Horia-Roman Patapievici made important contributions on various aspects of the comparative analysis of dictatorships. Vladimir Tismaneanu expresses his gratitude to the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland for its continuous support and encouragement regarding this project. Bogdan C. Iacob worked on the final stages of the volume while coordinating, at the New Europe College in Bucharest, the project "Turning Global: Socialist Experts During the Cold War" (UEFISCDI PN-II-RU-TE- 2014-4-0335) and holding a postdoctoral position at the Institute of History, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Part One

INTELLECTUALS AND
COMMUNISM IN EUROPE

MICHAEL DAVID-FOX

*Illusions of Influence and the Mystique
of Power:
The Fellow-Travelers and Stalin
as Philosopher King*

This chapter is based on an examination of the writings of the leading fellow-travelers of the 1930s and archival study of their Soviet visits. At its center is the web of concrete ties binding them to Soviet intellectual mediators and cultural institutions. It will make several interlocking arguments that address longstanding debates about Western intellectuals and communism.¹ First, the discussion explores the flexibility of what François Furet called the “myth of communism,” the twentieth century’s political myth *par excellence*.² Even intellectuals from the same country and political orientation were often attracted to radically different features of the Soviet order. That said, however, I will show that underlying leading fellow-travelers’ assessments of the entire Soviet experiment was often a personalized evaluation of Bolshe-

¹ Notable works in English on this topic include, most generally, Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals and Politics* (New York: NYRB, 2001), and in specific national contexts Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Lee Congdon, *Seeing Red: Hungarian Intellectuals in Exile and the Challenges of Communism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001); Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

² François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), and François Furet, *Inventaires du communisme* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2006).

vik intellectuals and, in the 1930s, especially Stalin, filtered through a longstanding European debate about thinkers versus men of action. Stalin was often viewed as an intellectual in power or an intellectual man of action; a kind of philosopher king.

Such views, however, would have had little consequence if Soviet intellectuals, cultural officials, and other mediators had not developed a relationship with these fellow-travelers that had meaning for both sides. In particular, they both developed an almost contractual understanding of the status of “friend of the Soviet Union,” which traded stature for public defense of the USSR. Finally, as part of this relationship, the massive Soviet celebration of foreign “friends” fostered illusions of influencing Stalin and the course of the revolution. Many of the leading intellectual “friends of the Soviet Union” publicly heaped praise on Soviet socialism as a superior society in part because they harbored the fantasy that through those connections they could claim a measure of power over it. This framework departs from monocausal explanations of such intellectuals’ interwar apologia for Stalinism, most of which downplay the importance of the intellectuals’ travel and concrete contacts with the Soviets.

The coincidence of Western enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment and the rise of the most repressive and murderous phase of Soviet communism under Stalin in the 1930s has made the topic of fellow-travelers one of the most widely discussed issues in the political, intellectual, and cultural history of the twentieth century. But the classic literature on the fellow-travelers was formed without historians of Russia, who can now delve into the visits of Western intellectuals and incorporate Soviet sources that have been declassified since the 1990s.³ My perspective comes out of almost a decade of research on the Soviet reception of Western visitors and Soviet cultural diplomacy in the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on Soviet relations with Central and Western Europe and the United States.⁴ In a nutshell, what I would like

³ The best-known work in English has gone through four editions: Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society*, 4th ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998). See also David Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁴ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford Uni-

to suggest are the benefits of moving from a sociology of intellectuals or intellectual history based solely on pro-Soviet intellectuals' writings and ideas, to a history of transnational contacts and entanglements on both sides.⁵

My focus is not visitors in general or even intellectuals in general, but a select and distinguishable group of the leading intellectual sympathizers. The term fellow-traveler was not what the Soviets called sympathetic foreign intellectuals, nor was it a term the intellectuals often applied to themselves. It was a translation of the Russian *poputchik*, an old Russian Social Democratic term that Trotsky applied pejoratively in 1923 to non-proletarian, non-party literary figures who cooperated with the Soviet regime.⁶ The Soviets preferred "friends of the Soviet Union," a status that emerged out of the cultural friendship societies first founded in Berlin in 1923 and from the 1927 Moscow "Congress of Friends" that took place on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. This is more than an issue of terminology, for

versity Press, 2012); Michael David-Fox, "Intellectuals and Communism," *Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 1: *World Revolution and Socialism in One Country*, ed. Steve Smith and Silvio Pons (Cambridge University Press, 2017): 526–50. Notable studies by scholars who work with Russian-language sources include Sophie Coeuré, *La grande lueur à l'Est: Les Français et l'Union soviétique, 1917–1939* (Paris, Seuil, 1999); Rachel Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir? Voyages en Russie soviétique (1919–1939)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002); Sophie Coeuré and Rachel Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de fil rouge: Voyages des intellectuels français en Union soviétique* (Paris: CNRS, 2012); Jean-François Fayet, *VOKS: Le laboratoire helvétique. Histoire de la diplomatie culturelle soviétique durant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg éditeur, 2014); Matthias Heeke, *Reisen zu den Sowjets: Der ausländische Tourismus in Russland 1921–1941* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003); Eva Oberloskamp, *Fremde neue Welten: Reisen deutscher und französischer Linksinтеллектуeller in die Sowjetunion, 1917–1939* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011); Anne Hartmann, "Ich kam, ich sah, ich werde schreiben": *Lion Feuchtwanger in Moskau 1937. Eine Dokumentation* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017); A. V. Golubev, "...Vzgliad na zemliu obetovanuiu..." *Izistoriia sovetskoi kul'turnoi diplomatii 1920–1930-x godov* (Moscow: Institut istorii RAN, 2004).

⁵ For a compatible approach applied to the history of the Comintern, see Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, trans. Dafydd Rees Roberts (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶ Lev Trotskii, "Literaturnye poputchiki revoliutsii," in *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Krasnaia nov', 1923), 40–83.

there is ample evidence that the status of “friend” was meaningful in many ways to Soviets and Western intellectuals alike.

For Soviet cultural officials, the term “friend” came to be meaningful in internal classifications of non-party foreign visitors. For example, “friends” commanded resources for travel invitations and publications of works in translation, as well as customized tours that included entrée into the top Soviet model institutions and meetings with leading Soviet cultural and political figures. The Soviets based their evaluations above all on written and public statements about the USSR by the foreign intellectuals, and friends were those who publicly defended and refrained from any serious criticism of the Soviet order. It is significant that the same discourse of friendship used in public to trumpet foreign admiration was also standard fare in internal party-state discussions of foreign figures, especially when it came to allocation of resources and organized hospitality.⁷

This status acquired an almost contractual relationship. For example, Fabian intellectuals Sidney and Beatrice Webb joined the best-known members of the fellow-traveling club after their two-volume, 1935 *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* became a propaganda coup for the Soviets. Beatrice’s diary demonstrates how she internalized her status as friend of the Soviet Union. She even observed how friendship with the Soviets dominated their social life (which had always been an extension of their political preoccupations), since the “narrow circle of those who wish to see us” were “mostly friends of Russia.”⁸ Romain Rolland was the high-minded Nobel laureate and fellow-traveler who was perhaps Soviet cultural diplomacy’s most illustrious asset. He used the category of “friend” in his audience with Stalin on June 28, 1935 to plead for privileged access to information about the USSR, which he could use in European debates about communism. At the forefront of the concerns Rolland raised directly with Stalin was the status of “the truest friends of the USSR,” by which Rolland, of course, meant himself. Rolland called for a “campaign of explanation” for sympathizers, and privileged information for himself, perhaps through the organization of VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad), the

⁷ For just one example, see GARF f. 5283, op. 1a, ed. khr. 118, l. 46.

⁸ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982–85): 4: 302, 304, 356; see also 444.

leading organization of Soviet cultural diplomacy, tasked with maintaining relations with all those foreign figures classified as members of the “intelligentsia.” In response, Stalin allowed that the Soviets did not sufficiently “inform and arm our friends,” but he slyly professed that the reason was simple respect for the autonomy of people living in a completely different milieu. “To direct these people from Moscow would be from our part too bold.”⁹ As the leading friends emerged as a relatively small group of largely literary figures who were celebrated, read, and quoted on a truly massive scale within the Stalinist culture of the 1930s, and whose travel to the land of victorious socialism became lavishly publicized visits of state prepared at the highest levels, it was more than amply made clear to them that public defense of the USSR was the *sine qua non* of friendship.

This is one reason, I would argue, why so many of these figures who expressed numerous doubts in private censored themselves in public. Rolland remained silent during the Great Purges, but agonized in private in his letters and diary.¹⁰ However, it is important to imagine how, given the scale of these Soviet friends’ glorification in Stalinist culture, and their meetings with Stalin, the illusions of influence I will discuss were not utterly far-fetched. For example, it was not just that Rolland was never given the privileged access to information that he thought would help him in European debates. Having given literally hundreds of statements and publications to the Soviet press, he could never receive a straight answer about why his one sharp criticism of nationalistic Soviet declarations of superiority over the rest of the world was never published in the USSR. Rolland, the Soviet icon, and the really existing man himself were not the same.¹¹

⁹ The unedited version of their talk is: “Beseda t. Stalina s Romen Rollanom. Perevodil razgovor t. A. Arosev. 28.VI.sg [1935],” with handwritten addition: “ne dlia pečati,” RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, ed. khr. 775, l. 1–16, here ll. 2, 3, 4, 8. For an in-depth discussion, see Michael David-Fox, “The ‘Heroic Life’ of a Friend of Stalinism: Romain Rolland and Soviet Culture,” *Slavonica* 11, no. 1 (April 2005): 3–29.

¹⁰ The most significant biography is by Bernard Duchatelet, *Romain Rolland, tel qu’en lui-même* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2002).

¹¹ Romain Rolland to Galya and Natasha Isaevaia (Novgorod), 26 November 1937; Mariia Rollan [Kudasheva] to Mikhail Apletin, 27 November 1937 and 29 December 1937, RGALI f. 631, op. 14, d. 74, ll. 98–99, 97, 104.

To make things more complicated, Western intellectual friends were often admired covertly by a leading group of Soviet intellectuals and cultural officials who extensively cultivated them. The Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky (an old Menshevik who later became an important intellectual figure of the Thaw), was a frequent visitor to the Webbs country house at Passfield Corner, where over weekend visits one of his most important missions was to explain away Beatrice's doubts. Maisky was instrumental in providing materials and vetting the Webbs' notorious, thousand-page apologia; for three years Maisky "systematically" arranged for "mountains of materials" to be delivered to the Webbs via diplomatic pouch.¹² Maisky's diary expressed great reverence for the Webbs as the cream of Western intelligentsia; he revered them for living a pure and scholarly life of the mind—even as they revered the Bolsheviks as daring intellectual fighters and powerful social engineers. Sidney and Beatrice may have had a poor feel for the Soviet system but they were acute observers of the personalities and trends of British politics and foreign relations. For Maisky, the most important bridge between the high politics of the Foreign Office and elite public opinion became in fact Sidney and Beatrice Webb.¹³ In general, Beatrice seems to have been his closest friend in Britain. Professionally as well as personally, Maisky gained much from the Webbs.

It is worth adding, to shed some additional light on Maisky's admiration for the Webbs and his close personal relationship with them, that the monumental pro-Soviet publication of these loyal "friends" abroad was deemed too dangerous to be widely distributed in the socialist homeland. In Soviet publications, the Webbs' *Soviet Communism* was criticized for its Fabian rejection of violent revolution and the depiction of the Party as a combination of "religious order" and corporate or

¹² Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo diplomata 1925–1945 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 193; *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, 4: 315.

¹³ Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky, *Dnevnik diplomata: London 1934–1943*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), 1: 6, 93, 202–203, 410. For an English edition with important commentary and annotations, see Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's 1932–1943*, trans. Tatiana Sorokina and Oliver Ready (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

professional body. In the over 1,100 pages there were more than enough awkward moments and divergences from Soviet orthodoxies—including, for example, references to the “persecution of the intelligentsia,” the use of terror, and “elaborately staged” show trials—that the work, while quickly translated into Russian in 1936, was withheld from a wide Soviet readership.¹⁴ The Politburo reviewed the Russian version of the Webbs’ opus in May 1936 to discuss its Fabian deviations, deciding that it could only be released in a small run of 2–3,000 copies distributed to a preapproved list (and declining Karl Radek’s proposed trick of announcing publication in the press but only displaying a few copies for show in bookstore windows).¹⁵

Another example of a key Soviet cultural official who was deeply influenced by Western intellectual “friends,” even as he carried out the missions of Stalinist cultural diplomacy after 1934, was Alexandr Arosev. An Old Bolshevik literary figure, intellectual, and former ambassador to Prague, Arosev met frequently with leading pro-Soviet Western intellectuals during the Popular Front as head of VOKS. In his secret diary he expressed overwhelming admiration for many of the European intellectuals he associated with in the 1930s, especially the entire gamut of literary intellectual fellow-travelers. He opined that the USSR was not doing enough to support them: “They come to us not without intellectual suffering and wavering. . . . Coming over to us was a great risk.” He felt his frequent contacts with such figures as Gide, Barbusse, and others restored his creative, cultural side, and, crucially, that they would provide major benefits for Soviet culture. The literary fellow-traveler he admired most was unquestionably Romain Rolland. In 1935, in his diary entry from Rolland’s villa near Geneva, Villaneuve, Arosev wrote that “the conversations with this great man moved me completely. . . . One wants to work like the bird sings, that is, as he does. Simple. No, I have never breathed in the

¹⁴ Webbs, *Soviet Communism*, vol. 1, 415; vol. 2, 550–52; 554, 557, 573, 600.

¹⁵ RGASPI f. 17, op. 163, d. 1109, ll. 120–21, discussed in G. B. Kulikova, “Pod kontrolem gosudarstva: Prebyvanie v SSSR inostrannykh pisatelei v 1920–1930-x godakh,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 4 (2003): 49; Leonid Maksimenkov, “Ocherki nomenklaturnoi istorii sovetskoi literatury: Zapadnye pilgrimy u stalinskogo prestola (Feikhtvanger i drugie),” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 2 (2004): 322–27.

atmosphere of work and thoughts and literature as here, at his [Rolland's] place."¹⁶

From this discussion, two interim conclusions can be advanced. First, the Soviet "handlers" referred to in the literature were not party hacks (although there were many of those, too) but the most talented cultural and political intellectuals of Moscow's pre-Purge, multilingual, multinational elite. These Stalinist Westernizers, as I call them with a deliberate sense of paradox, harbored their own illusions, of creating a hegemonic Soviet culture, which could not be accomplished without making it a magnet for Europe.¹⁷ Second, like Maisky with the Webbs, Arosev was fascinated with the "great artist" and "great man," as he called Rolland—to a measure equal to the French writer's fascination with Old Bolsheviks like Arosev, and through him Stalin. As Arosev wrote in his diary from Rolland's villa in 1935: "Again he [Rolland] became interested in who Stalin and Molotov were, what the lives of revolutionaries were like in the underground. Again I told him about prison and exile."¹⁸ Arosev, a childhood and lifelong friend of Molotov and an early adherent to the Stalinist wing of the Party, was purged and executed in 1937.

The proximity of the friends to the leading Stalinist Westernizers only fueled aspirations of influence. The allure of power may be common among intellectuals, but it is not somehow an essential, unchanging quality; it is marked by the historical conjuncture. The interwar

¹⁶ Arosev, diary entries from 26 September 1934 and 7 January 1935, in Ol'ga Aroseva and V. A. Maksimova, *Bez grima* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Tsentrpoligraf, 1999), 65, 68. For similar sentiments toward Shaw and other British intellectuals after a London meeting, see entry from 18 June 1935, 70. A more complete publication of Arosev's diaries is contained in O. A. Aroseva, *Prozhivshaia dvazhdy* (Moscow: AST, 2014): 55–356. For in-depth examinations of Arosev, see Michael David-Fox, "Stalinist Westernizer? Aleksandr Arosev's Literary and Political Depictions of Europe," *Slavic Review*, 62, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 733–59, and Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 28–31, 138–41, 513–28, 596–99, 817–, and *passim*.

¹⁷ On this point, see Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ Arosev, diary entry from 7 January 1935, in Aroseva and Maximova, *Bez Grima*, 67–69

period launched the debates that continue to reverberate over the proper role of intellectuals vis-à-vis power and politics. Cauté observed that “none of those prominent French and German humanists who embraced the Soviet Union late in life ever quite overcame the inbred apartheid of *Geist* and *Macht*,” or *pensée* and *action*, the belief that “the true vocation of art and intelligence is incompatible with politics.”¹⁹ That division was built in before it was swamped in the deluge of the era of total war and revolution; the yearning for political action of the interwar period provoked a countermovement, and intellectuals in Europe and the U.S. were torn. Precisely because many of the so-called friends never completely overcame that inherent dichotomy, they were all the more attracted by the Bolshevik revolutionary intelligentsia and Stalin as a kind of intellectual in power.

Prominent intellectuals who had exhibited little interest in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, such as Rolland and André Gide, became friends of the Soviet Union precisely during the “socialist offensive” of the First Five-Year Plan, the opening phase of Stalinism. It is revealing to focus on the “Fabian Trimuvirate” (the Webbs and George Bernard Shaw, leading members of the Fabian Society since its founding in 1884), since each of them earned a place among the most prominent intellectual supporters of Stalin and Stalinism in the 1930s—but, intriguingly enough, for differing reasons. As we have already seen, both Shaw and the Webbs, who first visited the Soviet Union in 1931 and 1932, respectively, were subject to the “pull” factors of Soviet outreach, including the efforts of key intermediaries in recruiting each of them as eminent foreign visitors. In addition, however, they were individually influenced by features of the Soviet system that appealed to their differing intellectual make-ups. Shaw, who also sympathized with fascism, was particularly drawn by the cult of the leader; Sidney Webb, the consummate civil servant, lauded the efficient machinery of the Soviet state; Beatrice Webb, the old cooperative movement theorist, longed for equality and justice.²⁰ The myth of communism

¹⁹ Cauté, *The Fellow-Travelers*, 154.

²⁰ See, inter alia, Mark Bevir, “Sidney Webb: Utilitarianism, Positivism, and Social Democracy,” *Journal of Modern History* 74, 2 (2002): 217–52. See also Getrude Himmelfarb, “The Intellectual in Politics: The Case of the Webbs,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, 3 (1971): 3–11; and Kevin Morgan, *The Webbs and Soviet Communism*, vol. 2 of *Bolshevism and the British Left* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

was flexible indeed; among the Fabians alone, motivations drawing them toward friendship were multiple and varied. At the same time, there were major commonalities: all were inclined toward elitism and social engineering, which helped Shaw and the Webbs to set aside other Fabian principles when they looked East. Crucially, they were all in a different way fascinated by Bolshevik men of action.

For example, Beatrice Webb was drawn to the daring Bolshevik underground with its ethos of self-abnegation and sacrifice, and after reading works on Lenin and Krupskaya, wrote in her diary about “an amazing concentration and intensity of intellectual life . . . in poverty and exile, spied upon by police agents, at risk of imprisonment, torture and death, surrounded by comrades in like circumstances.” By contrast, the comfort and social esteem of British Labor leaders represented the “ultra-essence of British bourgeois morality.”²¹ Beatrice took distinct pride in the irony that this group had become the “most effective exponents and defenders” of Soviet communism; it made up for their earlier lack of revolutionary sacrifice. In contrast to her sense of insufficiency, her bombastic Fabian colleague, Shaw, the Irish playwright with the rapier wit, whose Soviet visit and meeting with Stalin came in 1931, loved to play up his role as the grand old man of socialism and contemporary of Marx, posturing as the teacher of Lenin and Stalin.²² After his 1931 Soviet visit Shaw referred to himself as a Fabian communist, dubbed Stalin a Fabian, and slyly suggested that the Soviets had become “sound Fabians and are on the way to becoming complete Shavians.” Behind the *épatage* lay a serious ideological and personal issue. Shaw scholar H. M. Geduld hits the nail on the head when he writes that Shaw had “triumphed as a jester and a man of letters . . . but never as a politician and an influential ‘world-betterer.’” Behind Shaw’s leader-worship and saucy appropriation of communism for Fabianism lay “a deep sense of personal failure.”²³

²¹ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, vol. 4, 302, 304, 356; see also 444.

²² The most detailed reconstruction of the trip is in Harry M. Geduld’s introduction to *Shaw, The Rationalization of Russia*, ed. by Harry M. Geduld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 9–32.

²³ Paul A. Hummert, *Bernard Shaw’s Marxian Romance* (Lincoln: Max Reinhardt, 1969), 164; H. M. Geduld, “Bernard Shaw and Adolf Hitler,” *The Shaw Review* 4, vol. 1 (January 1961): 11–20, here 11. See also T. F. Evans, “Introduction: The Political Shaw,” and “Shaw as a Political Thinker, or

As for Sidney Webb, he imagined the Soviet leaders as state-builders who had fulfilled some of the causes he had cherished and championed long before. As the VOKS file on Sidney noted in 1934, the draft of the Webbs' book was originally "The Constitution of Soviet Communism," a title that recalled the Webbs' 1920 piece of imaginative social engineering, "A Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain." While Shaw loudly shouted that Stalin was a Fabian, Sidney Webb discretely implied that the Soviet system was a fulfillment in practice of his own earlier conception of a democratic and cooperative society. Only this can explain the extraordinary emphasis in the Webbs' 1935 book on Stalinism as the apogee of consumer cooperation and what the Webbs called "community consumption."²⁴

The 1930s were not only the heyday of Western Soviet sympathy, but the heyday of Stalin's attention to Western intellectuals. The most important of Stalin's Kremlin conversations with visiting intellectual celebrities was his reception of Shaw and Emil Ludwig in 1931, H. G. Wells in 1934, Henri Barbusse on several occasions between 1928 and 1934, Romain Rolland in 1935, and Lion Feuchtwanger in 1937.

Despite the distinction that was already being drawn between Stalin and the Europeanized Old Bolsheviks, the dictator was in his way eminently qualified to be taken for something of an intellectual in power: among foreign literary figures who were not Marxist theoreticians he assumed authority on Marxist-Leninist theory, and he had a more than decent knowledge of Russian and European literary classics. Stalin also had an excellent memory and prepared intensively with briefings on the views and preferences of his intellectual guests.²⁵

the Dogs that Did Not Bark," in *Shaw and Politics*, ed. by T. F. Evans (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 1–21, 21–26.

²⁴ "Otchet o poseshcheniia S. Vebba," 19 September 1934, reprinted in Golubev, 'Vzgliad na zemliu obetovanuiu...', 228; A. Ia. Arosev to Lazar' Kaganovich, 17 September 1934, GARF f. 5283, op. 1a, d. 255, ll. 205–206; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935), vol. 1, chap. 4, vol. 2, chap. 8, and conclusion, 1123–25.

²⁵ Roy Medvedev, "European Writers on their Meetings with Stalin," *Russian Politics and Law* 42, 5 (Sept.–Oct. 2004): 78–92. More broadly, see Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London: Routledge/Courzon, 2002).

The stage was set for the intellectuals to diverge over whether he was a humble man of the people or a kind of philosopher king.

Rolland very much took the latter position. The *grand écrivain* was a man of causes: one of the most prominent pacifists in World War I, when he was vilified for his stance, he was also a prominent spokesman for German–French cultural reconciliation, and later a leading champion of antifascist culture and East–West dialogue. Very different from the flamboyant Shaw, or, for that matter, the nonconformist Gide, Rolland reminded many observers of a clergyman: thin, frail, earnest, and puritanical, he was a didactic and compulsive correspondent. Rolland’s Sovietophilia was neither simple nor fragile; sturdy enough to be battered but not destroyed by the purges and the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression pact, it was nourished by a startlingly wide array of sources.²⁶ Some were ideological and cultural—his longstanding socialism and expertise in the French Revolution, his antifascism, and his enthusiasm for popular enlightenment. Perhaps the most striking, and the most disturbing, factor was that that Rolland was an “inveterate hero-worshiper.”²⁷

Rolland’s veneration of the politically engaged culture-creator helps to explain his otherwise bizarre move from the celebration of Gandhi in the 1920s to Stalin in the 1930s. In the unedited, Russian text of Rolland’s talk with Stalin, Rolland hailed Stalin in his opening statement as the first representative and source of what he called the “new humanism.” He spoke of how millions in the West looked to the USSR to solve the current economic and moral crisis. One had to do more than repeat the words of Beethoven, “Ô homme, aide-toi toi-même!” Rather, one had to aid them and give them advice. Of course, Beethoven was the life on which Rolland had based his most famous work, the monumental Bildungsroman *Jean-Christophe*. But in this comment the author of *Jean-Christophe* seemed to place Stalin even

²⁶ Here see Michael David-Fox, “Understanding and Loving the New Russia: Mariia Kudasheva as Romain Rolland’s Cultural Mediator,” chap. 6 of *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2015), 163–84.

²⁷ David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 27–29.

above the artistic genius of his hero. For Rolland, as for the Fabians, the Bolsheviks represented a potential merger of the intellectual and the man of action. Rolland indicated as much in the Kremlin meeting when he referred to Marx and Lenin as founders of *la partie intellectuelle*. This merger was revealed even more clearly in Rolland's 1935 book *Compagnons de route*, where chapters about his literary "companions" Shakespeare and Goethe were supplemented by a chapter on Lenin as a potential synthesis of the Russian revolutionary tradition with European culture. "Two maxims, which complete each other: 'We must dream,' says the man of action [Lenin]. And the man of the dream [Goethe]: 'We must act!'"²⁸

The case of French writer and communist organizer Henri Barbusse, whom Stalin met personally in 1927, 1932, 1933, and 1934, reveals a very different relationship with and attitude toward Stalin. Like a figure such as Surrealist and Communist Louis Aragon, Barbusse confounded the division between party members and largely non-party fellow-travelers. Barbusse had openly criticized Rolland in a high-profile debate in the early 1920s from the position of an intellectual party soldier.²⁹ Barbusse's status as a Communist allowed him to carry out sensitive missions in the Comintern and Soviet-led front organizations of the 1920s. At the same time, Barbusse was bitterly attacked by both French militants and Comintern literary and cultural figures, many of them living as émigrés in Moscow. Their antagonism, along with the anti-intellectualism of the PCF in this period, prevented him from becoming a fully accepted party insider; at the same time, likely as a result, VOKS at least treated him not so much as a foreign Communist but in the same category of non-party Western friends. This only underscored Barbusse's rather anomalous position, for VOKS, which maintained the fiction that it was a non-governmental

²⁸ For Rolland's opening statement, see Romain Rolland, *Voyage à Moscou (juin-juillet 1935)*, ed. Bernard Duchatelet (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992), 127, 133; Rolland, "Compagnons de route" quoted in Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, 255; "Beseda t. Stalina s Romen Rollanom. Perevodil razgovor t. A. Arosev. 28.VI.sg [1935]," RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, ed. khr. 775, l. 1–16. Goethe was the key icon in the Germanophone antifascist culture of the period.

²⁹ Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, chap. 5.

“society,” that was usually very careful to stay away from public links to international communism.³⁰

But Barbusse had an ally who could shield him from the most vociferous of the militants’ attacks: Stalin. Indeed, Barbusse formed his allegiance to Stalin before the general secretary’s consolidation of sole power at the end of the 1920s and before the first inklings of the Stalin cult, to which he later made a large contribution. He was thus the only major intellectual to meet with Stalin in the 1920s as well as in the 1930s. Of great interest is Barbusse’s two-and-a-half-hour conversation with Stalin from 1927 (it is clearly not the case, as Medvedev suggests, that Shaw was the first Western writer to meet Stalin in 1931).³¹ In 1927, Barbusse spoke to Stalin on the eve of a visit to Georgia and the South Caucasus. Barbusse approached the general secretary with a concrete problem: he needed to distinguish Soviet political violence, including the integration of independent Georgia in 1920, from the fascist violence he was mobilizing intellectuals against in Europe. How should he explain to Europeans the difference between fascist (“white”) and red terror? Stalin explained that after 1918 there was no such thing as red terror, the “shootings did not repeat themselves.” If it weren’t for the ruthlessness and strength of the capitalists, moreover, the Soviet Union might have been able to abolish the death penalty. “Of course,” Stalin continued, “the death penalty is an unpleasant thing. Who finds it pleasant to kill people?” Here one might ask: who indeed? At this moment, Barbusse clearly signaled his acceptance of Stalin’s reasoning: “This is absolutely correct. In current conditions eliminating the death penalty would be suicide for Soviet power.”³² Here was someone upon whom Stalin could rely; a trajectory was set

³⁰ VOKS report on Barbusse, 26 June 1928, GARF f. 5283, op. 8, ed. khr. 62, l. 155–56; Henri Barbusse to O.D. Kameneva, GARF f. 5283, op. 1a, ed. khr. 118, l. 175. Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–1940: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2007), chap. 3, esp. 56–65; 149–53. The attacks on Barbusse peaked in early–mid 1932; see, e.g., “Zadachi Soiuza revoliutsionnykh pisatelei Frantsii,” *Literatura mirovoi revoliutsii*, no. 2 (1932): 59–65; Bruno-Iasenskii, “Monde. Directeur: Henri Barbusse,” *Literatura mirovoi revoliutsii*, no. 2 (1932): 66–67.

³¹ Medvedev, “European Writers,” 78.

³² “Kratkoe izlozhenie Besedy s tov. Barbiussom ot 16. IX. 27,” RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, ed. khr. 699, ll. 2–10, quotations l. 6.

that culminated in Barbusse's 1935 biography, *Staline: Un monde nouveau vu à travers un homme*. The book, published in a meticulously vetted Russian translation a year later, aimed at demonstrating the authenticity of Soviet popular acclaim for Stalin and the impossibility of his personal dictatorship.³³

Barbusse's 1935 *Staline* figured large in the official creation of the Stalin cult inside the USSR as well as in its much less-known international dimensions, yet it nonetheless took a very different tack from the Fabians and Rolland in terms of its depiction of Stalin. The Bolshevik leader was not portrayed as an intellectual in power. Rather, Barbusse placed enormous stress on Stalin as an empiricist, an applied Marxist, and a *praktik* filled with common sense—in other words, a man of action.³⁴ This clearly ran against the inclinations of his Soviet mediator and personal censor, the ideologist Aleksei Stetskii, who tried to get Barbusse to portray Stalin as “the greatest theoretician of Marxism after Lenin.” Even after Stetskii's editorial interventions, Stalin in Barbusse's text was still dubbed a “simple man” and “a man of action.” Barbusse's Trotsky represented an altogether different type: while the words “theoretician” and “intellectual” were absent in his descriptions of Trotsky, Barbusse did not need to use them: Barbusse's Trotsky had too much imagination, loved to talk too much, and was opinionated and verbose, whereas the general secretary was the “man of the situa-

³³ Henri Barbusse, *Staline: Un monde nouveau vu à travers un homme* (Paris : Flammarion, 1935). Andrew Sobanet's new work, *Generation Stalin: French Writers, the Fatherland, and the Cult of Personality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), was released too late for me to take into account.

³⁴ Although much Western scholarship has followed the tradition of seeing Stalin as a practical party worker (*praktik*) rather than a theoretician or member of the party intelligentsia, van Ree's study of the young Stalin clarifies, adds nuance, and ultimately challenges this hoary dichotomy, both historically and historiographically. Van Ree argues that the young Stalin “not only obviously identified himself as an *intelligent* but also throughout the period under discussion here continued to assign the leading role in the party committees to the *intelligenty*.” But as a practical teacher and propagandist of workers he identified with one part of the party intelligentsia, as opposed to the other wing of “litterateurs.” Erik van Ree, “The Stalinist Self: The Case of Ioseb Jughashvili (1898–1907),” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 257–82, quotation 257, and esp. 279–80.

tion” (*l’homme de la situation*) with “practical sense.”³⁵ While a number of fellow-travelers like Shaw and the Webbs were attracted to Stalin as a Marxist-Leninist social engineer, wielding power to reshape society, Barbusse’s Stalin emerged as the anti-intellectual as much as the anti-Trotsky, whose understanding of the true essence of Leninism was virtually instinctual. But, of course, even Barbusse’s inversion represented the anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals.

In this Chapter, I have emphasized the pro-Stalinist Fabians because they underline the differing ways in which even very similar intellectuals from the same political orientation sought “friendship” with the Soviets and because they complicate the monocausal explanations for Sovietophilia that have dominated the literature. The Webbs were hardly the alienated intellectuals of Paul Hollander’s sociological explanation in his book *Political Pilgrims*.³⁶ In the British context, they were well-connected and deeply established political and intellectual figures. The weakness of liberalism, parliamentarianism, and constitutionalism, the centerpiece of Tony Judt’s indictment of the French intellectual tradition in his book *Past Imperfect*, was hardly operative in the case of England or the Fabians.³⁷ Indeed, in the 1930s, the United States as well as England had a fair share of intellectual friends of Soviet communism. At the same time, despite coming from the same country, having similar political sensibilities and being married, even Sidney and Beatrice Webb were attracted to the Soviet system for markedly different reasons, illustrating what Furet called attention to in calling the image of communism a malleable myth.³⁸ What I have tried to show is that this broad and powerful myth did not live by ideas alone. The key role of mediators and the mystique of power worked alongside extensive ties to the Soviets and the status of “friend of the Soviet Union” to reinforce intellectual orientations. Ideas and circumstances both had to come together to bind intellectuals to the object of their desire.

³⁵ A. I. Stetskii to Henri Barbusse, 29 September 1934, RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, ed. khr. 699, ll. 124–25; Barbusse, *Staline*, 21, 36, 43, 189, 192, 201. The Russian translation is: Anri Barbius [Barbusse], *Stalin: Chelovek, cherez kotorogo raskryvaetsia novyi mir*, ed. and trans. Stetskii (Moscow: n.p., 1936). See also Coeuré, *La grande lueur a l’Est*, 233–35.

³⁶ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*.

³⁷ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 149, 205–26.

³⁸ Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*.

DAVID BRANDENBERGER

*Stalin and the Muse of History:
The Dictator and His Critics on the Editing
of the 1938 Short Course*

The central text of the Stalin-era canon, the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)* was compulsory reading for Soviet citizens in all walks of life between 1938 and 1956. Over forty million copies of the textbook were published in the USSR during I. V. Stalin's reign.¹ Originally attributed to an anonymous an anonymous editing commission of the communist party's Central Committee at the time of its first publication, the *Short Course* was rumored from the start to have been ghostwritten by Stalin himself. Eight years later, as the general secretary's cult of personality ascended to new heights after World War II, official communiqués confirmed this speculation and credited Stalin with the book's authorship.² In the years since, many commentators have continued to assume that Stalin wrote large parts of the text, some going so far as to argue that the *Short Course* ought to be read as an autobiography of sorts.³

This article stems from a critical edition of the *Short Course* under development with M. V. Zelenov for Yale University Press.

¹ "Izдание proizvedenii I. V. Stalina v Sovetskom Soiuze s 7 noiabria 1917 goda po 5 marta 1953 goda: Statisticheskie tablitsy," in *Sovetskaia bibliografiia: Sbornik statei i materialov*, issue 1 (34) (Moscow: Izd-vo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1953), 224.

² "Ob izdanii Sochinenii I. V. Stalina," *Pravda*, 20 January 1946, 2.

³ Most recently, see Jochen Hellbeck, "Introduction," in *Autobiographical Practices in Russia / Autobiographische Praktiken in Russland*, ed. by Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller (Göttingen: V&R Unipress GmbH, 2004), 23.

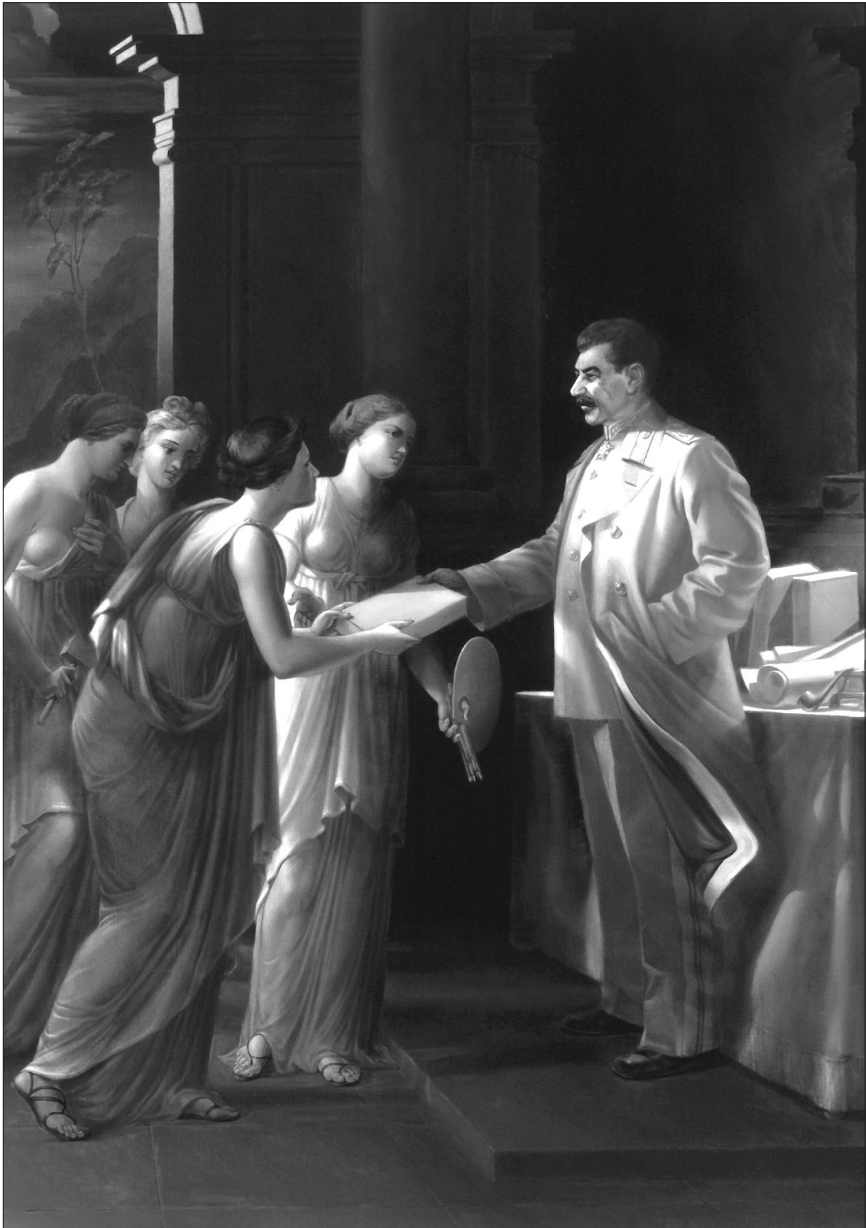


Fig. 1. Clio, the Muse of History, hands Stalin a massive volume as the Muses of Art and Architecture stand by. Komar & Melamid, *Stalin and the Muses*, 1981–82. Oil on canvas. 75 x 55 inches. Photography: D. James Dee. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Historically, many of those speculating about Stalin's role in the creation of the *Short Course* have used this episode to inform elaborate conclusions about the dictator's identity as man and leader. Some have held the text to speak to the leader's immodesty and hubris, while others have suggested that it reveals a profound sense of psychological inferiority. Still others have claimed that the text reflects totalitarian goals ranging from "mind control" to the control of history itself. It was perhaps in the tradition of this sort of hyperbolic criticism that the non-conformist artists Komar and Melamid satirized Stalin as communing with Clio herself in their famous 1981–1982 canvas *Stalin and the Muses*.

This article examines the mythologization of Stalin's role in the creation of the *Short Course* by comparing speculation on Stalin's epic involvement in the writing of party history with the historical record itself. It argues that although Stalin invested heavily in his efforts to shape the party history narrative, his editing was not nearly as megalomaniacal as it has been traditionally represented. Particularly exaggerated has been commentary on Stalin's promotion of his own personality cult. Ultimately, this article offers a cautionary tale regarding these critics' bid to expose this dictator's totalitarian drive, inasmuch as they themselves turn out to have promoted an instrumental view of history that is nearly as politicized as that which they condemn from the Stalin period.

The Historiography on Stalin and Clio

Perhaps the first and most famous critic of Stalin's role in the writing of the *Short Course* was N. S. Khrushchev, who famously assailed his former mentor in his Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Exposing Stalin's crimes and deviations from the Leninist path, Khrushchev used the *Short Course* to illustrate his predecessor's efforts to exaggerate and distort his role within the party's official historical narrative: "Does this book correctly depict the party's efforts in the socialist transformation of our country, in the construction of a socialist society, in the industrialization and collectivization of our country? Does it correctly depict the other steps taken by the party, which unerringly followed the path outlined by Lenin? No—the book speaks principally about Stalin, about his speeches and about

his reports. Everything is tied to his name without the smallest exception.” He continued: “And when Stalin claimed that he himself had written the *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, this arouses nothing less than indignation. Can a Marxist-Leninist really write about himself in such a way, praising himself to the skies?”⁴ Invoking the *Short Course* to highlight Stalin’s immodesty, Khrushchev connected many of the book’s idiosyncrasies to his predecessor’s ostensibly craven need for recognition and self-aggrandizement. This for Khrushchev made the *Short Course* a key element of the cult of personality, which in turn was said to explain many of the excesses of the Stalin period.⁵

Khrushchev’s speech proved formative in nearly all subsequent assessments of Stalin’s involvement in the *Short Course*. In the USSR, echoes of Khrushchev’s criticism were found in the new official histories of the party released in the late 1950s.⁶ B. N. Ponomarev, the editor of the 1959 *History of the CPSU*, denounced the *Short Course* in specific terms in 1962 for the way it had ossified party history into schematic and formulaic thinking and stymied new theoretical work on Marxism-Leninism. In the second edition of his textbook, Ponomarev

⁴ “‘O kul’te lichnostii ego posledstviakh.’ Doklad Pervogo sekretaria TsK KPSS tov. Khrushcheva N. S. XX s’ezdu Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza 25 fevralia 1956 goda,” in *Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva o kul’te lichnosti na XX s’ezde KPSS—dokumenty*, ed. K. Aimermakher (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), 106. There had been, of course, earlier private criticism of the *Short Course*. S. I. Zhabankov confided to A. G. Solov’ev right after the textbook’s publication about Stalin’s immodest, exaggerated role. See diary entry from October 13, 1938, in A. G. Solov’ev, “Tetrady Krasnogo professora (1912–1941 g.g.),” in *Neizvestnaia Rossiia: XX vek*, vols. 1–4 (Moscow: Istoricheskoe nasledie, 1993), vol. 4, 199.

⁵ A. I. Mikoian had actually offered the conference’s first extended critique of the *Short Course*, denouncing its unreliable narration of history. Khrushchev, though, focused on Stalin’s role in this narrative rather than on its broader, triumphalist nature. Khrushchev’s criticism of the *Short Course*, in other words, did not prevent him from leaving much of its historical narrative intact. See “Rech’ A. I. Mikoiana,” in *XX s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza: stenograficheskii otchet*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1956), vol. 1, 325–26.

⁶ See, for instance, B. N. Ponomarev, et al., eds., *Istoriia KPSS* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959), 483–84.

explicitly condemned the *Short Course* for its “serious shortcomings.” It was “weighed down by the spirit of the personality cult and did not give a truthful, objective account of many issues in party history.”⁷

In the west, Leonard Shapiro published a short article in early 1960 that largely accepted Khrushchev’s version of events. Apparently, the *Short Course* had been emplotted around Stalin, “its only real hero,” in order to reinforce his personality cult. Shapiro elaborated upon this point later that year in a monograph on the Soviet communist party in which he argued in passing that the *Short Course* was also designed to enforce the official line on party history. This scripting of the Bolshevik past was apparently so careful and articulate that it set up “a uniform pattern of public utterance in which the first trace of unorthodox thought immediately reveals itself as a jarring dissonance.” Thus the text was designed not only to indoctrinate its readers, but to police and discipline them as well.⁸

That same year, Bertram D. Wolfe approached the *Short Course* from a different perspective, arguing that the textbook had been designed to replace an array of older, obsolete party histories from earlier in the 1930s. Although almost all of these publications had celebrated Stalin quite willingly, “each was short-lived because with every change of line and every change in the magnitude of the colossus, the past had to be retroactively altered once more.” By 1938, Stalin had apparently grown tired of this textual revolving door and decided to intervene in the process in order to produce a reliable party history curriculum. He was “determined to fix the past himself, as he fixed music, linguistics, genetics, philosophy, legal theory, economics, Marxism, Leninism and all else besides.” According to Wolfe, Stalin cast particular attention on “his own place in history” along the way. The

⁷ *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie o merakh ulucheniia podgotovki nauchno-pedagogicheskikh kadrov po istoricheskim naukam, 18–21 dekabria 1962* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 19; B. N. Ponomarev, et al., eds., *Istoriia KPSS*, second ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), 506. Interestingly, this criticism was removed from the third edition of the text after Khrushchev’s ouster.

⁸ Leonard Shapiro, “A New History—a New Mythology,” *Problems of Communism* vol. 9, no. 1 (1960): 58–61; Leonard Shapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, first ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 471–72.

end result was a monolithic historical narrative that would promote its Stalin-centric story for nearly twenty years.⁹

Paul Avrich also published an analysis of Khrushchev's challenge to the *Short Course's* orthodoxy in 1960. Avrich argued that Stalin had supported the writing of this text out of a desire for "a new history that would portray the nation's leader in heroic proportions." Stalin also used the text to canonize his own contributions to Marxism-Leninism, in as much as he "fancied himself a kind of philosopher-king." Finally, apparently unsatisfied with his position as Lenin's disciple, Stalin had his own role rewritten in such a way as to "rival Lenin as a maker of history." This self-promotion not only betrayed a strong connection between the *Short Course* and the personality cult, but it exposed the utter hypocrisy of Stalin's actions. It was, according to Avrich, "impossible to reconcile such an heroic treatment of Stalin's role in history with the Marxist philosophy of history that Stalin himself outlines."¹⁰

Sydney Ploss echoed this judgment in 1961, contending that the "underlying design" of the *Short Course* "was to endow Stalin with infallibility and [to] compromise thoroughly his just-purged enemies." Ploss elaborated on this thesis by claiming that the textbook "abounds in stories of vicious anti-Lenin and anti-Soviet plots hatched throughout the regime's existence by Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, and others at the bidding of foreign intelligence services and thwarted thanks only to Stalin's timely intervention. His wisdom alone seemed to constitute the dynamic of internal progress." For Ploss, the *Short Course* was deliberately reductionist and instrumental. Nothing else could explain the stilted artificiality of the narrative or the presence of so many "myths and homilies" in the text.¹¹ Twelve years later, Ploss again

⁹ Bertram D. Wolfe, "The New Gospel According to Khrushchev," *Foreign Affairs* vol 28, no. 4 (1960): 576–87.

¹⁰ Paul Avrich, "The *Short Course* and Soviet Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly* 75 (1960): 541–43. Major questions have been raised about such claims of Marxist heresy in recent years—see, for instance, Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 155–68, esp. 161–62.

¹¹ Sidney I. Ploss, "The Bolshevik Past as the First Secretary Likes it," *World Politics* vol. 13, no. 1 (1960–1961): 79. Ploss asserts incorrectly that the *Short Course* had downplayed the importance of the Comintern and foreign

returned to the *Short Course* to elaborate on Khrushchev's contention that Stalin had manipulated the text to ensure himself "coequal status with Lenin." "In conformity with Stalin's own directives," Ploss wrote, the *Short Course* "elevated him to the same pinnacle of immortality hitherto reserved for Lenin alone." What's more, at the same time that the *Short Course* was promoting Stalin within the party's Olympus, it was also complicit in the character assassination of his Old Bolshevik rivals—indeed, "no ink was spared in the vilification of the closest associates of Lenin whom Stalin had ruthlessly liquidated by means of the Moscow purge trials of 1937–38." Ultimately, Ploss argued, "the effect of this wholesale falsification of history" was far reaching. It relegated "the most eminent political and military organizers of 1917–20 to the dustbin of history for the greater glory of Stalin and of those lesser party figures who were credited in the *Short Course* with having established Bolshevik rule at the lower levels and were now members in good standing of the Politburo, Secretariat and Orgburo."¹²

If most of these condemnations ultimately stemmed from Khrushchev's 1956 criticism of the *Short Course*, Leszek Kołakowski went considerably further in 1978 in the third volume of his well-known *Main Currents of Marxism*. Declaring the *Short Course* to be the product of a brigade of authors working under Stalin himself, Kołakowski agreed with previous critics that it "established a whole pattern of Bolshevik mythology linked to the cult of Lenin and Stalin." Unsatisfied with this condemnation, however, Kołakowski argued that the book was designed to promote not just the personality cult, but totalitarianism itself. "The *Short Course* was not merely a work of falsified history, but a powerful social institution—one of the party's most important instruments of mind control, a device for the destruction both of critical thought and of society's recollections of its own past." Describing the context surrounding the *Short Course*'s revisionism in Orwellian terms, Kołakowski averred that "a totalitarian system cannot survive without constantly rewriting history, eliminating past events, personalities and

communist parties in 1938 because of ongoing diplomatic attempts to create an antifascist coalition with Great Britain and France. See p. 91.

¹² Sydney I. Ploss, "Soviet Party History: The Stalinist Legacy," *Problems of Communism* vol. 21, no. 4 (1972): 35–36.

ideas and substituting false ones in their place.” The *Short Course*, in other words, served as both catechism and “memory hole.”¹³

Ten years after Kołakowski used the *Short Course* to bludgeon the Soviet system from the outside, his analysis was seconded by historians within the USSR speaking out in favor of M. S. Gorbachev’s calls for *glasnost*. In early 1988, I. L. Man’kovskaia and Iu. P. Sharapov assailed the *Short Course* for its promotion of the cult of personality, its depreciation of Lenin, its dogmatism and its incorrect, dishonest descriptions of many events. “It was as if all the distortions of historical truth that were done in order to establish Stalin’s personality cult were concentrated in this textbook, which became the canon for everyone studying party history.” Worse, the official nature of the text ensured that it would have a stultifying influence over not only the historical discipline, but other related fields in the arts and sciences as well.¹⁴

This anguish over the disciplinary impact of the textbook reappeared only months later when N. N. Maslov published the first article on the *Short Course* to cite archival evidence. An overview rather than a full-scale study or textual analysis, Maslov nevertheless reported several very interesting discoveries. First, the *Short Course* was based on a prototype party history written by Em. Yaroslavsky and P. N. Pospelov at the Politburo’s request. Second, this prototype “was already weighted down with Stalin’s cult of personality to a massive extent when it was sent to Stalin for his examination and editing. Lenin’s role in party history was decisively depreciated, Stalin’s services were incredibly overblown, and in several places the book’s apologetics were taken to absurd levels.” Third, Stalin’s eventual editing of this prototype contradicted much of the conventional wisdom about his

¹³ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 863. The book’s first Polish and English editions first appeared in 1978. Kołakowski had studied the *Short Course* in his youth; much of his description here is informed by Hannah Arendt’s more general discussion of the role of the press and propaganda under totalitarianism. See also Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, second ed. (New York: Meridian, 1962). For a recent variation on Kołakowski’s thesis, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 129.

¹⁴ I. L. Man’kovskaia and Iu. P. Sharapov, “Kul’t lichnosti i istoriko-partiinaia nauka,” *Voprosy istorii KPSS* 5 (1988): 69.

promotion of the personality cult that had been in circulation for some thirty years. Specifically: "While working on the book's galleys, Stalin struck out the most odiously-sounding praise, deleted the accounting of all the arrests and terms of internal exile that he had endured, and cut a subsection entitled 'The Beginning of Stalin's Revolutionary Activity' that immediately followed the subsection entitled 'The Beginning of Lenin's Revolutionary Activity.'" Maslov then followed these archival revelations with even more unexpected revelations of his own. After revealing that much of the *Short Course's* focus on the personality cult had actually been written by Yaroslavsky and Pospelov, and after noting that Stalin actually attempted to reduce the excesses of the cult, Maslov then questioned the importance of his discoveries to the broader inquiry at hand: "Is it possible to consider these corrections to be a sign of Stalin's modesty, as an indication of his determination not to let his name stick out? No, not at all. Stalin generally scratched out only those exaggerated examples of flattery that were insufficiently believable or might have provoked an ironic laugh from the book's readers." Nothing short of a dramatic about-face, Maslov dismissed the importance of his own archival findings and then reiterated the position originally argued by Khrushchev that Stalin had intended the *Short Course* to promote the cult of personality. Maslov then maintained this position in nearly half a dozen subsequent publications.¹⁵

At the same time that Maslov was working on the *Short Course* in the Central Party Archive, D. A. Volkogonov was making use of the same materials for his groundbreaking Stalin biography. And if his examination of the *Short Course* was less detailed than Maslov's,

¹⁵ N. N. Maslov, "'Kratkii kurs istorii VKP(b)'—entsiklopediia kul'ta lichnosti Stalina," *Voprosy istorii KPSS* 11 (1988): 57. This essay was reprinted multiple times during the period, including Maslov, "'Kratkii kurs istorii VKP(b)'—entsiklopediia kul'ta lichnosti Stalina," in *Surovaia drama naroda: Uchenye i publitsisty o prirode stalinizma*, ed. Iu. N. Senokosov (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. litry, 1989), 334–52; Maslov, "Ideologiiia stalinizma: Istoriia utverzhdeniia i sushchnost' (1929–1956)," in *Novoe v zhizni, nauke, tekhnike—Seriiia "Istoriia i politika KPSS"* (Moscow: Znanie, 1990); Maslov, "Ob utverzhdenii ideologii stalinizma," in *Istoriia i stalinizm*, ed. by A. N. Mertsalov (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1991), 37–86. Maslov, it should be said, lacked archival access to substantial portions of the *Short Course* archival paper trail, which remained until the late 1990s in the Presidential Archive.

his condemnation was more strident. Eliding all questions about the book's authorship and editing, Volkogonov contended that it was not only a cornerstone of the cult of personality, but an "encyclopedia of dogma" responsible for ossifying critical thought and reformist thinking ever since:

The entire history of the party, as Stalin laid it out in the *Short Course*, was nothing but a series of victories for some and defeats for others—for spies, double dealers, enemies and criminals. He set up everything in a schematic, Procrustean framework within which everything in reality must be as it is in theory—the theory that he himself promoted. . . . According to Stalin's logic, everything that happened was to be expected: the growth of the communist movement, the rout of the "right deviation," the "treachery" of the Social Democrats. There was nothing else at work here—neither creativity nor free will, nor imagination nor risk taking.¹⁶

According to Volkogonov, this dogmatic approach to historical events, precipitated by Stalin's own limited intellectual horizons, had a stultifying effect on the whole field. Three aspects of this "mummification of history" were particularly pernicious. First, Stalin's historical narrative suggested that progressive social change was always revolutionary and was always accomplished from above—a view that precluded incremental reform and grassroots initiatives. Second, the *Short Course* argued that the Soviet economy functioned in full accord with Marxism-Leninism, denying even the most obvious shortcomings in implementation. Third, Stalin's approach to history attributed all setbacks experienced by the USSR to enemy sabotage and wrecking, ruling out any role for chance, contingency or exigency in the narrative. According to Volkogonov, not only was the book criminally bad, but it was complicit in crimes still being committed against Soviet society into the late 1980s.

¹⁶ D. A. Volkogonov, *Triumf i tragediia—politicheskii portret I. V. Stalina v dvukh knigakh*, 2 vols., 2 pts. (Moscow: Izd-vo APN, 1989), 1/1: 216–17, 2/2: 143–48. "Encyclopedia of dogma" was a neologism that Volkogonov coined to parody Yaroslavsky's characterization of the *Short Course* as an "encyclopedia of Bolshevism." See Em. Yaroslavsky, "Kratkaia entsiklopediia bol'shevizma," *Istoriik-Marksist* 5 (1938): 3–31.

The dissident Roy A. Medvedev, although lacking Maslov's and Volkogonov's archival access, expressed similar concerns about the dogmatism embedded in the *Short Course* in 1989 in the second edition of his magnum opus, *Let History Judge*. According to Medvedev, the Soviet social sciences had become so debased during the 1930s that "the truth was no longer what corresponded to facts, to empirical research, but what Comrade Stalin had declared to be true." He illustrated this argument by citing the work of an anonymous historian whose critique of the *Short Course* sounded suspiciously like Volkogonov: "The extremely one-sided and schematic conception of this book was subordinated in the final analysis to the task of exalting and glorifying Stalin, validating and justifying all his actions. . . . The narrative itself . . . was accomplished by stringing together quotations from Stalin's works or paraphrases of them." According to Medvedev's anonymous informant, it was incorrect to think of the *Short Course* as a history text, inasmuch as it was "not meant to give a scholarly elucidation and explanation of the historical process." It was instead a catechism that had been "written in the form of expounding axioms, which required no proof and did not have to be understood, but memorized, learned by heart." The only conceivable purpose of such dogmatism was to indoctrinate the society in Stalin's cult of personality.¹⁷

This interpretation of the *Short Course*'s design and intent was matched by another ambitious argument advanced in 1990 by Robert C. Tucker in the second volume of his famous Stalin biography. Citing Maslov's work, Tucker acknowledged that the *Short Course* had been originally drafted by Yaroslavsky and Pospelov. That said, he ignored Maslov's findings that it was Yaroslavsky and Pospelov who had interpolated the personality cult into the text and that Stalin had actually reduced the number of hallelujahs in the final publication. Instead, Tucker stressed the opposite. According to the historian, Stalin repeatedly reinforced the cult of personality by rewriting stretches of the *Short Course* in order to exaggerate his services to party and nation.¹⁸ That

¹⁷ Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 809–10, 816.

¹⁸ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 532–36.

said, if Khrushchev and many of his successors had explained Stalin's support for the cult by referencing his supposed immodesty, Tucker argued that Stalin's exaggeration of his accomplishments stemmed from a profound sense of psychological inferiority. Instead of reflecting Soviet propaganda, the contents of the *Short Course* apparently reflected Stalin's own private fantasies about the role that he ought to have played in the formative years of the party and state. "It was," Tucker concluded, "a fictitious version of his life, his arrogated autobiography as a revolutionary hero, writ large in the party's history. Whether Stalin managed to believe this, and repress his memory of much that contradicted it, will probably never be known. But he certainly needed to believe it and to know that people in Soviet society did." A psychoanalytical approach to history that Tucker had pioneered in the first volume of his Stalin biography, it referred to the *Short Course* as proof of Stalin's craven bid to become a second Lenin.¹⁹

As original as Tucker's approach was, it did not sway Andrzej Walicki, who devoted a subsection of his 1995 book on Marxism to the *Short Course*. Walicki preferred his colleague Kołakowski's characterization of the *Short Course* as a symbol of the party's totalitarian ambition to control people's minds. Referring to the book facetiously as "a bible and as the main prayer book of the secular religion of Marxism-Leninism," he stressed the book's cynical design. It was, according to Walicki,

to perform at least three functions: legitimating, disciplining and mobilizing. The concept of objective and implacable laws of development directing history toward a scientific predetermined goal was an excellent legitimation of Stalin's dictatorship: it made it clear that the activity of the party was consistent with universal laws of development, that its cause was therefore invincible, that all its opponents were doomed to perish, and that skeptical hesitations could only lead to outright betrayal. The claim to a monopoly of scientific truth justified in its turn the strictest control over thought. In this way, all potential dissidents were

¹⁹ Ibid., 536–37. See also Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary: A Study in History and Personality, 1879–1929* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973).

mercilessly condemned in the name of the highest authorities of the secular religion: the authority of History and Science.

Walicki thus subscribed fully to the idea of a totalitarian logic structuring the *Short Course*.²⁰

Two years later, the Trotskiite historian V. Z. Rogovin published a book on the Terror entitled *Party of the Executed*. In it, he detailed Stalin's effort first to purge the Bolshevik ranks of oppositionists and then to cover up his crime. The *Short Course*, in this sense, was the crowning achievement of what Trotsky had called the "Stalinist School of Falsification," inasmuch as it allowed the general secretary to justify his actions by either vilifying his rivals or literally erasing them from history. An argument that evoked elements of Kołakowski's totalitarian "memory hole" thesis, it was balanced by Rogovin's more predictable criticism of the *Short Course*'s role in advancing Stalin's cult of personality and promoting his dogmatic style of thinking.²¹

Between 2004 and 2005, Medvedev returned to the fray, inspired by a series of new document publications on the origins of the *Short Course* by M. V. Zelenov. Publishing a new essay on the subject in three different places, Medvedev extrapolated ambitiously from Zelenov's material in order to reinforce points that he had made fifteen years earlier.²² The general secretary, he argued, was the real author of the *Short Course* and had used Yaroslavsky, Pospelov, and the anonymous Central Committee editing commission as a cover to obscure his authorial responsibility for the text's "exorbitant praise of his own person." The *Short Course*, according to Medvedev, was designed to inculcate the cult of personality into Soviet society and was to be considered a Rubicon of sorts: its publication put an end to the party's

²⁰ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 431–43, here 431 and 437.

²¹ V. Z. Rogovin, *Partiia rastreliannykh* (Moscow: V. Z. Rogovin, 1997), chap. 52.

²² See the document publications by M. V. Zelenov in I. V. Stalin, *Istoricheskaia ideologiia v SSSR v 1920–1950-e gody: Perepiska s istorikami, stat'i i zametki po istorii, stenogrammy vystuplenii—sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, vol. 1, 1920–1930-e gody, ed. by M. V. Zelenov (St. Petersburg: Nauka-Piter, 2006).

historical experience in its Leninist form and heralded the start of a new Stalinist epoch.²³

As this survey indicates, a broad consensus has formed not only about Stalin's authorship of the *Short Course*, but about the ulterior motives behind the volume's deployment. Many commentators agree, for instance, that the book was emplotted to indoctrinate Soviet society in Stalin's cult of personality. Some see this as a sign of arrogance and hubris, while others see it as evidence of intellectual or psychological inadequacies. Still others view Stalin's intervention into the writing of the *Short Course* as no less than a totalitarian plot to gain control over people's minds or history itself. And all of these interpretations implicitly question Stalin's credentials as a Marxist-Leninist true-believer, with some going so far as to declare the *Short Course* to be evidence of profound ideological hypocrisy.²⁴

Aside from these similarities, the interpretations resemble one another in other ways. They all, for instance, assume an exceptionally high degree of intentionalism in regard to Stalin's creation and editing of the text. Many see the entire project as a conspiracy within which the *Short Course* played the role of a Trojan Horse, concealing subliminal messages of domination and control between its lines of text. And even those who do not subscribe to conspiracy theories assume Stalin to have been a supremely capable editor. Indeed, according to most of the schema sketched out by Stalin's critics, the general secretary must have exercised expert, day-to-day control over the writing of the *Short*

²³ R. A. Medvedev, "Kak sdelan *Kratkii kurs*," *Svobodnaia mysl'* vol 21, no. 2 (2004): 130–46, here 137, 146; *Istoriia VKP(b): reprintnoe izdanie*, ed. R. A. Medvedev (Moscow: Logos, 2004), iii–xliv; Medvedev, *Chto chital Stalin?* (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 2005), 215–32.

²⁴ Only a handful of recent commentators have questioned the characterization of the *Short Course* as a function of the personality cult. See Fabio Bettanin, *La fabbrica del mito—Storia e politica nell'URSS staliniana* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1996), 151–78; Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, 165, 309–10, nn. 37, 39; Robert Service, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 361; Sarah Davies, "Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult of the 1930s," in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorship: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, ed. by Balazs Apor et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 36–37; David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination and Terror under Stalin, 1928–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

Course in order to emplot it with its insidious subtext. Much of the literature assigns Stalin such a prescient, all-knowing role in the process that Komar and Melamid's depiction of Stalin collaborating with the Muse of History seems only slightly exaggerated. But to what extent do these interpretations find support in the historical record?

The Archival Evidence

The historical record on Stalin's efforts to shape the way that party history was narrated is very rich. Starting with his letter to *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* in 1931, Stalin intervened repeatedly in the discipline, demanding improvements in curricular materials and repeatedly reorganizing the ideological establishment that was presumably there to supply them. The general secretary took Clio and her craft very seriously and prioritized the production of an accessible, mobilizational party history.

After the start of the Terror, these efforts to develop a "usable past" for the party ground to a halt as both the historians and their protagonists fell victim to the purges. Seemingly unaware of this paralysis, Stalin launched a new initiative in April 1937, appointing a troika of court historians—Em. Yaroslavsky, V. G. Knorin, and P. N. Pospelov—to compose a two-tier curriculum for party cadres by fall. An untenable proposal from the start, it was hobbled almost immediately by Knorin's arrest that June. In the end, it would take Yaroslavsky and Pospelov nearly a year to produce a series of four working drafts of the more elementary of the two commissioned volumes. When complete, the book comprised a dense and turgid narrative, overwhelmed by factual materials and distinctly under-theorized. The book's sense of historical agency was dominated by two protagonists—Stalin and Lenin. Secondary historical agency was assigned to the masses, the party, the komsomol and the Comintern. At Stalin's request, Yaroslavsky and Pospelov depicted the central theme of the party's historical experience to be its struggle with the opposition—both external and internal. And their final manuscript bore this out by weaving discussion of a paranoid, claustrophobic right-left conspiracy throughout its narrative.²⁵ When Stalin turned to

²⁵ See also Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, chap. 7.

proofreading the *Short Course* galleys in a systematic way in late May 1938, he probably expected the task to be relatively straightforward. Instead, what he found frustrated him enough to set aside several weeks that summer in order to reedit the book, excising large amounts of text and interpolating long stretches of his own writing in its place.²⁶ Stalin eventually justified these revisions to Yaroslavsky, Pospelov, and the Politburo by claiming that the prototype's engagement with Marxism-Leninism was too halting.²⁷

That said, a close look at the general secretary's editing reveals his objections to have been much more wide-ranging. On a fundamental level, Stalin found Yaroslavsky and Pospelov's manuscript to be plodding, poorly written, and choked with historical minutiae. Thus not only did Stalin interpolate a theoretical red thread into the narrative where he felt it was missing, but he ruthlessly edited the text to strike out details, descriptions, and entire paragraphs that did not contribute directly to their respective chapters. Curiously, amid all of this work, Stalin drew the line at thoroughly reorganizing or even rearranging the text to improve its emplotment, sequencing, internal consistency, or sense of dramatic action. Stalin was neither a professional editor nor a trained historian and his work reveals great attention to detail but little literary sense about how otherwise to refine the text.

Thematically, Stalin made a number of major changes to the narrative. He altered its accounting of the nature and extent of the Terror. He reduced its attention to institutions such as local party organizations, the Komsomol, and the Comintern.²⁸ He adjusted the way that it dealt with a number of policies, like the national question.²⁹ But most important for our purposes were the changes Stalin made to the

²⁶ The dating of Stalin's editing is based on periods during which he did not regularly receive visitors in his Kremlin office—see A. A. Chernobaev, ed., *Na prieme u Stalina: Tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisei lits, priniatykh I. V. Stalinym (1924–1953 gg.)* (Moscow: Novyi khronograf, 2008), 236–38.

²⁷ Stalin to the Politburo and authors of the *Short Course* (16 August 1938), RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1219, ll. 36–37.

²⁸ On the Comintern, see David Brandenberger, "The Fate of Interwar Soviet Internationalism: A Case Study of the Editing of Stalin's 1938 *Short Course* on the History of the ACP(b)," *Revolutionary Russia* 29:1 (2016): 1–27.

²⁹ See David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov, "Stalin's Answer to the Nationality Question: A Case Study in the Editing of the 1938 *Short Course*," *Slavic Review* no. 73, vol. 4 (2014): 859–80.

Short Course's treatment of the personality cult. Textual analysis reveals that the general secretary's editing of the text's commentary on the cult was much more ambitious and thoroughgoing than ever suspected before—cuts and deletions that total some ten thousand words.³⁰ Stalin did this for at least two reasons. First, as is well known, Stalin had a complex and inconsistent relationship to the cult,³¹ which led him to reject Yaroslavsky and Pospelov's routine interpenetration of party history with ritualistic paeans to the general secretary's wisdom, ingenuity, foresight, and faithfulness to Lenin's legacy. Second, as Stalin reduced the amount of attention devoted to the personality cult in the text—not just asides and parenthetical clauses, but entire sentences, paragraphs, pages, and subsections—he reassigned some of this historical agency to Lenin, a handful of close comrades in arms, and especially to the central party apparatus. Ultimately, this transformation did not remove the cult of personality from the text altogether, but it did reduce its profile to a much larger degree than previously believed.³²

If textual analysis can clarify the nature of Stalin's editorial work on the *Short Course*, other sorts of archival research can determine whether or not it deserves the reputation of a totalitarian text. The *Short Course* was published in *Pravda* in September 1938 and then as a hardcover book later that fall in the first of 301 mass printings. As noted above, some forty million copies of the book would be released by Stalin's death in 1953.³³ Early press coverage associated with the

³⁰ See David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov, eds., *Stalin's Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

³¹ Davies, "Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult," 29–46. I have argued elsewhere that Stalin saw the cult as offering a personification of abstract Soviet principles to an otherwise disunited, undereducated population. Because the *Short Course* was aimed at the most sophisticated of Soviet audiences, it did not rely on the cult as much as more populist publications did. See Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, chaps. 3, 7, 11.

³² The fact that this text originally fused party history with Stalin's biography is not surprising, of course. Not only was this fairly common during the rise of the personality cult, but Yaroslavsky had long sought permission to write a separate biography of Stalin. See Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 59–60, 211–13.

³³ "Izдание proizvedenii I. V. Stalina v Sovetskom Soiuze," 224.

Short Course's publication greeted the book with great fanfare and called upon all educational institutions from schools to study circles to drop everything and focus on the new narrative.³⁴ The *Short Course* circulated widely in society (its ubiquity being enhanced by the censor's purging of other party history textbooks from libraries and bookstores); within a few months, it precipitated a through restructuring of the party's indoctrinational system. Citation of the *Short Course* quickly became a key part of authoritative commentary on an array of subjects ranging from history and philosophy to the arts and letters. Ultimately, its narrative would also define the way party history was depicted in literature, film, and museum exhibits; its contents likewise defined what knowledge was necessary to possess for membership in the party and Komsomol. Such canonical status guaranteed the *Short Course* hegemonic control over the party catechism from 1938 until its denunciation in 1956.³⁵

But does such hegemony justify the use of the term *totalitarian* in reference to the *Short Course*? As alluded to above, the text not only emerged amid the chaos of the Great Terror, but was itself a chaotic affair, requiring three major rewrites by Yaroslavsky and Pospelov before Stalin decided to redo the book himself. It is clear that much of this time was spent on very basic issues—particularly the emplotment of the narrative and the role played by various actors (Lenin, Stalin, other party bosses, the party itself, the masses, the opposition, international capital, etc.) and major themes (the personality cult, vanguardism, socialism in one country, internationalism, the Friendship of the Peoples, etc.). And although Yaroslavsky and Pospelov certainly delivered a selective, shamelessly pro-Bolshevik text, there is no evidence within the archival record that they attempted to imbed into it anything resembling subliminal messages or other sorts of unusually manipulative rhetoric.³⁶

³⁴ See P. B. Grechukhin and V. N. Danilov, "Vykход 'Kratkogo kursa istorii VKP(b)' i predvoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo," in *Istoriograficheskii sbornik: mezhvuzovskii sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, issue 19 (Saratov: Izd-vo Saratovskogo universiteta, 2001), 54–55.

³⁵ Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, chap. 11–12.

³⁶ Indeed, Yaroslavsky and Pospelov refrained from using populist appeals to Soviet patriotism and russocentrism that were increasingly common in Soviet mass culture around 1937–1938.

Stalin, too, interacted with the text in a surprisingly straightforward way. An amateur editor, he rewrote passages, sentences, paragraphs and entire sections of the text but refrained from rearranging the narrative in a particularly profound or calculating way. What's more, he added little new to the text, aside from a large section of chapter four on dialectical and historical materialism. True, he changed the way that the book advanced a variety of themes—deemphasizing the personality cult, for instance, and stressing the agency of the central party apparatus in its place—but even this was done in a rather crude and inconsistent way. Although it is undeniable that Stalin reedited the entire book and rewrote certain portions of it, he did not recast it in new or subtle ways, nor did he take steps to make it more persuasive or accessible. If anything, he heightened its formulaic nature and schematicism. The end result was a party catechism that many found very difficult to read, much less understand.

Conclusion

The fact that Stalin spent several weeks at the height of the purges in 1938 editing the *Short Course* indicates that he took his work with the Muse of History very seriously. That said, this collaboration with Clio differed significantly from how it was characterized by Khrushchev in 1956 and by various critics in the years since. It was Yaroslavsky and Pospelov, after all, who delivered to Stalin a prototype of the *Short Course* in April 1938 that was already thoroughly interpenetrated with the cult of personality. The general secretary rejected this singularly high profile for the cult, stripping hundreds of lines, paragraphs and even entire pages from the text. In so doing, he did not purge the cult completely from the narrative, but he did reduce its profile and reassign much of its historical agency. Such evidence undermines the notion that the *Short Course* functioned as either a testament to Stalin's hubris or a therapeutic device with which he treated his alleged inferiority crisis.

The nature of Stalin's collaboration with Clio also casts doubt on the notion that the *Short Course* was designed to function as an instrument of totalitarian "mind control." There is, for instance, no evidence of any sophisticated attempt to imbed subliminal messages into the

text. Indeed, the whole editorial process was much clumsier and ad hoc than it was exacting or particularly competent. And while there is no doubt that Stalin intended for the *Short Course* to govern party members' study of history, he did not adopt what postwar theorists would call a fully totalitarian approach to inculcating the textbook within Soviet society. Even if he had wanted to, it is not clear that he would have known how.

This ultimately means that if Stalin's critics were more-or-less right about the general secretary's bid to shape and alter party history, they were right for all the wrong reasons. Instead of prioritizing the personality cult or totalitarian mind control, Stalin focused on publishing a much more basic, foundational text that would articulate his vision of the party's experience in theory and practice. Such prosaic concerns were seldom reflected in the critical assessments of the *Short Course* that followed, due to their fixation with the personality cult and totalitarianism—an embarrassing state of affairs that led Robert Service in 2004 to question whether theses commentators “had ever even bothered to read the *Short Course*.”³⁷

Aside from being factually incorrect, the critics' approach to Stalin's editing of the *Short Course* was also methodologically suspect. Determined to publish exposés on the audacity of the general secretary's totalitarian demiurge, the critics accepted at face value Khrushchev's hyperbolic, politicized denunciation of Stalin and then extended this indictment, often influenced more by George Orwell and Hannah Arendt than by the historical record itself.³⁸ Archival access on this issue played a paradoxical role in this affair—if a lack of access before the late 1980s did not deter early speculation about the editing of the *Short Course*, the increasing availability of archival materials after 1988 has had little measurable effect on the overall situation.

The result of this saga of Stalin's collaboration with the Muse of History is rather sobering in at least three respects. First, Stalin's critics' determination to expose his hubris and arrogance led them to

³⁷ Service, *Stalin*, 362.

³⁸ Arendt's own passing commentary on the *Short Course*, it should be noted, was considerably more restrained than her larger argument about the function on the party-dominated press. See Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 341–42, 353, 413–14.

engage with the past in ways that were nearly as opportunistic and tendentious as Stalin's own attitude toward the writing of history. Worse, the fact that the critics joined together one after another to promote this sort of mythmaking led to the formation of an entire literature on the subject that continues to affect modern scholarship on Stalinism today. Worst of all, the effects of this literature are not just limited to the study of Stalin and Stalinism. Insofar as the general secretary is often regarded as the archetype of the modern tyrant, this critical tradition on Stalin and the editing of the *Short Course* has distorted the study of other twentieth-century dictators and dictatorships as well.

STANISLAO G. PUGLIESE

*Resisting the Totalitarian Temptation:
The Case of Ignazio Silone*

Fascism and communism in Italy created an alluring temptation for a diverse group of Italian intellectuals. Many succumbed, including some of the most creative and innovative artists, philosophers, theorists, scholars, and academics. Their story has been well told.¹ But there was a minority of Italian intellectuals who resisted the totalitarian temptation. Ignazio Silone (1900–1978), a founding member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), had to experience totalitarianism firsthand before painfully extricating himself from the Stalinist nightmare.

It is not often that an author has the opportunity to revisit with his readers an earlier work, but the present volume affords an occasion to rethink the Italian writer Ignazio Silone's tormented relationship with Marxism.² His struggle offers a prism through which students and scholars of Italian studies might engage Marxism in Italy during the twentieth century.

¹ Among many, see Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism, From Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Gabriele Turi, *Fascismo e il consenso degli intellettuali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980); A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

² Parts of this essay have previously appeared in *Bitter Spring: A Life of Ignazio Silone* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009). I thank publisher Jonathan Galassi for permission to reprint.

While Secondino Tranquilli (his given name) was born May 1, 1900, “Ignazio Silone” was born in 1923 in a Spanish prison. Perhaps it was no coincidence—and surely appropriate—that at the time he was reading Dostoyevsky. “Silone” was derived from the ancient warrior Poppedius Silo, a native of Silone’s beloved Abruzzo, who had led a successful revolt against the tyranny of Rome in 90 B.C. and thereby gained official recognition of the local population’s autonomy. “Ignazio” he borrowed from the Spanish Counter-Reformation saint Loyola and it was chosen to “baptize the pagan surname.”³ In this defiant act of self-appellation and identity-creation, he thereby synthesized a classical, pagan past with the Christian tradition.

Ignazio Silone struggled all his life—whether in politics or literature—to bring dignity and humanity to those whose lives were often sacrificed to greed and power. His own internal struggle was no less titanic; an anguished entanglement with both the secular promise of socialism and the transcendent vision of Christianity. Unlike the Biblical Jacob, Silone wrestled with *two* angels and *both* failed him. He was forced to realize that he had sought in politics something that politics could not grant him. Silone was left with the profound sadness that “Christianity’s place in modern society was more tragic and contradictory”⁴ than the Church would have us believe.

Silone has most often been associated with the protagonist of his novels *Bread and Wine* and *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, Pietro Spina. (“Read my books,” he once said, “only in them do I fully recognize myself.”) A communist intellectual and activist, Spina is returning from exile to his native Abruzzo, hunted by the fascist police. In order to elude arrest and move about the countryside, he dons the robes of a priest and becomes Don [Father] Paolo Spada. The metamorphosis from Pietro Spina (literally Peter [the] Thorn) to Paolo Spada (Paul [the] Sword) is revealing: The communist “thorn” is transformed into the religious “sword.” The American literary critic Edmund Wilson, after reading Silone’s novels sitting on the benches of the Villa Bor-

³ Ignazio Silone, *Il pane di casa*, edited by Giuseppe Ardrizzo (Bergamo: Minerva Italia, 1971); quoted in Bruno Falcetto, “Cronologia,” in Ignazio Silone, *Romanzi e saggi*, hereafter *ISRS* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998/1999) vol. 1, lxxv.

⁴ Ignazio Silone, *Emergency Exit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 27.

ghese Gardens in Rome, Italian dictionary at his side, perceptively sensed that Silone was “a queer mixture of priest and communist.”⁵ Nicola Chiaromonte, Silone’s fellow founder and editor of the literary-cultural journal *Tempo Presente*, and one of the few people who could claim to be close to the writer, intuited that Silone was in some ways a “*pretecontadino*,” a peasant priest.⁶

Yet Silone’s life and experience is reflected in many of his characters, not just Pietro Spina/Paolo Spada. There is the peasant Berardo Viola in *Fontamara*, Thomas the Cynic in *The School for Dictators*, the disillusioned party intellectual Rocco De Donatis in *A Handful of Blackberries*, the doggedly persistent Andrea Cipriani in *The Secret of Luca*, the compassionate Daniele of *The Fox and the Camellias*, and the self-effacing Pope Celestine V in *The Story of Humble Christian*. But there is always a clear, explicit and sincere identification with the poor Christ, the suffering Christ, the peasant Christ who figures in the mythology of the rural poor. And in his last, unfinished work, *Severina*, Silone for the first and only time identifies himself with a female protagonist. Severina, a young convent initiate who refuses to give false testimony in court even though ordered to do so by her Mother Superior, grew out of Silone’s fascination at the end of his life with Simone Weil. A member of the French underground, a writer, and Jew who died from self-starvation in 1943, Weil inspired Silone to create Severina as bystander to a crime, thus embodying what writing meant for him: “the absolute necessity of bearing witness.”⁷

“He became a socialist,” R. W. B. Lewis wrote, “because he wanted to become a saint.”⁸ As a priest says of one of Silone’s characters, “socialism was his way of serving God.”⁹ The transfiguration from the

⁵ Silone at the time was teaching Wilson Italian in postwar Rome. Lewis M. Dabney, *Edmund Wilson: A Life in Literature* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 321–22.

⁶ Nicola Chiaromonte, “Silone il rustico,” *Il Mondo* 20 August 1952, 5.

⁷ Ignazio Silone, “Emergency Exit,” in *Emergency Exit*, translated by Harvey Fergusson II (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 46.

⁸ R. W. B. Lewis, “Ignazio Silone: The Politics of Charity,” in *The Picaresque Saint* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1956), 113, 121.

⁹ Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine* in Ignazio Silone, *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, translated by Eric Mosbacher, revised by Darina Silone (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2000), 438.

relatively anonymous Secondino Tranquilli to the famous writer Ignazio Silone was neither the first nor the last of his many self-transformations.

Did Silone knowingly encourage a misreading and a conflation of his heroic and morally pure main characters with his own biography? Is it true, as others now insist, that Silone offered a confession for his transgressions as a police spy in a minor protagonist? In March 1996, the Italian historian Dario Biocca presented archival documents implicating Silone as a former fascist police spy. The documents are letters purportedly written by Silone—some signed “Silvestri” others not—to a high-ranking fascist police official in Rome, Guido Bellone.¹⁰ For more than a decade, in Italy, France, Britain, America and elsewhere (even Japan and Afghanistan), a tidal wave of ink has been spilled in a heated and often acrimonious debate: are all the documents authentic and, if so, what is their significance in revising the common conception of Silone as a moral exemplar of the twentieth century, committed to fighting both fascism and communism?

Like an ancient Hebrew prophet or one of the early, persecuted Christians, Silone insisted on a moral vision of the world. His writing—“bearing witness”—was to become the testimony of an age. This is related to what might be called “the Christian quandary” or Silone’s “wrestling with the Lord.” He refused to take the more facile path of an easy atheism or agnosticism. Christianity for Silone was both a historical movement, tied to a certain place and time, and a transcendent, timeless moral force. This conflicting tension between an adamant historicism and a desire for transcendence are ever-present in his thought and writing. Silone and his main protagonists are not so much searching for a hidden God as being hounded by the Lord. A doggedly persistent deity haunts Silone and his characters, seeking them out in desolate landscapes and humble farmhouses, donkey stalls and empty churches. The moral and ethical impetus is more similar to that of St. Augustine’s *Confessions* than Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. There is, as Irving Howe noted, an irreducible tension in all of Silone’s writings between the secular promise of socialist liberation and the Christian

¹⁰ Elizabeth Leake, *The Reinvention of Ignazio Silone* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali, *L’Informatore. Silone, i comunisti e la polizia* (Milan: Luni, 2000); Dario Biocca, *Ignazio Silone. La doppia vita di un italiano* (Milan: Rizzoli 2005).

promise of spiritual transcendence.¹¹ Despite his identification with both Christianity and socialism, Silone indelibly defined himself as “a Socialist without a Party, a Christian without a Church.”¹²

Silone was honest enough to recognize the potential and contemporary failure of the Catholic Church just as he fearlessly recognized the potential and failure of orthodox Marxism. There was no Dantean, “comedic” vision of Christianity in Silone; he confessed to being an “absurd Christian.” Theologically, orthodox Christianity cannot accept absurdity or nihilism, yet for Silone, these must be confronted before they can be transcended. For Silone, the promise of Christianity as embodied in the Easter Resurrection has not come to pass. Instead, for the peasants of southern Italy—indeed for peasants and workers around the world—it is, he insisted, still—and always—Good Friday.

Nor could Marxism offer salvation or redemption. In an early work he once concluded: “The future belongs to Socialism.” Years later, he repudiated that sentiment and the entire work in which it was written and strictly forbade its reprinting.¹³ Just as he could not bring himself to simply accept a comedic teleology of Christianity, he eventually came to question and then reject Marxist eschatology and teleology.

Although tragedy and sorrow were inherent in the human condition—he often wrote of “our inhuman fate upon the earth”¹⁴—there

¹¹ Irving Howe, “Introduction” to Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine*, translated by Eric Mosbacher (New York: New American Library, 1988), v–vi.

¹² Interview in *L'Express*, Paris, January 23, 1961.

¹³ Ignazio Silone, *Der Fascismus: seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung* (Zurich: Europa Verlag, 1934). In spite of Silone’s clear instructions that the book was not to be translated into Italian, it appeared as *Il fascismo. Origini e sviluppo* (Carnago: SugarCo Edizioni, 1992) and, most recently, edited by Mimmo Franzinelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2002). Speaking of this last version, Darina Silone, the writer’s widow, wrote that “Franzinelli has done a really splendid job.” When asked about the possibility of an English translation, she noted that a British publisher was interested but that she hoped they would not move forward as “it couldn’t possibly be nearly as good as the Mondadori edition.” Personal correspondence, Darina Silone to the author, July 7, 2002.

¹⁴ Letter to Girolamo Valenti meant as a preface to a 1936 American edition of *Fontamara*, that, for unknown reasons, was never published. The original letter is today archived in the Tamiment Institute of New York University and was published by Sergio Bugiardini in *Ignazio Silone. Clandestino del novecento*, edited by Luce d'Eramo (Rimini: Editori Riminesi, 1996), 146–48.

remained the possibility of hope. His politics could be described as a humanistic socialism, combined with a compassionate libertarianism. In a sympathetic response to the student uprisings of 1968, Silone commented that “democracy has a duty to respect utopia.”

By nature silent, meditative, and melancholic, Silone belied the stereotype of the gregarious, outgoing, extroverted southern Italian. In *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, a sympathetic character remarks to Pietro Spina’s grandmother (modeled on Silone’s own maternal grandmother): “There is a kind of sadness, a subtle kind of sadness that must not be confused with the more ordinary kind that’s the result of remorse, disappointment, or suffering; there’s a kind of intimate sadness and hopelessness that attaches itself for preference to chosen souls. . . . That kind of sadness has always been very prevalent among sensitive individuals in this part of the world. Once upon a time, to avoid suicide or madness, they entered monasteries.”¹⁵

Unable or unwilling to enter a monastery, Silone gravitated to politics at an early age. But painfully shy, uncomfortable in the public light, and perpetually doubtful of himself, Silone never had any of the qualities necessary for a successful political career. He was a difficult husband, an exasperating friend, a mediocre politician, an aloof acquaintance, a morose presence in public, a distant and cool relative, often manic-depressive, sometimes suicidal, and carried out an epistolary exchange with a police official that has now shadowed his reputation for the last decade (some used this exchange to accuse Silone of being a fascist police spy). Yet, starting in the 1930s, he crafted a body of work that testifies to a searing political and spiritual crisis and still bears fruitful reading. Silone offers us today a critical commentary on everything that we as human beings have experienced in the twentieth century: from the failed promise of political utopia to disillusionment with art; from the nihilism of totalitarianism to the moral temptations and seductive corruption of an affluent but savage, consumerist culture. His *Manifesto for Civil Disobedience* of December 1942, in which he urges the peoples of Europe to rise up against the Fascist and Nazi dictatorships with non-violent public resistance, makes one think of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

¹⁵ Don Severino speaking to Donna Maria Vincenza, Silone, *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, in Silone, *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, 590.

By 1967, Iris Origo would write that admiration for Silone “has now become not only the fashion, but almost a certificate of integrity.”¹⁶ Almost as soon as Origo had penned these words, another “Silone affair” exploded when it was discovered that the Congress for Cultural Freedom, of which Silone was a leading member, and his beloved journal, *Tempo Presente*, were being indirectly financed by the Central Intelligence Agency with funds laundered through the Ford Foundation. Silone immediately resigned from the CCF and in 1968 closed down the journal, but the allegations that he was a spy for the CIA persisted. Documents from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., however, demonstrate that during World War II Silone was working with the OSS (Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the CIA) in trying to overthrow fascism and establish democracy in Italy.¹⁷

His fervent letters and telegrams depict a Silone who was desperate that the Italian people, victims of fascism for over twenty years, should not have to pay the price for the sins of Mussolini’s regime. A careful reading of these documents reveals that Silone was no spy. Furthermore, it hardly seems likely that Silone was later a spy for the CIA when, despite the intervention of both Adlai Stevenson and Clare Boothe Luce, he was denied a visa to visit the United States until the mid-1960s. (He had, during World War II, been offered asylum by no less a person than Eleanor Roosevelt.) In light of his beleaguered circumstances—denied by both the right and the left—Silone was adopted by the democratic socialists of the United States and lauded by the intellectual and literary circles of *The Partisan Review*, *Dissent*, and *The Nation*. Critics and writers such as Clement Greenberg, Alfred Kazin, Mary McCarthy, and Irving Howe worked to bring his work to the attention of an American audience.

Slowly but surely Silone’s reputation survived all these charges. After his death in 1978, it seemed that Silone’s literary reputation was secured, especially after the distinguished publishing house Mondadori published much of Silone’s oeuvre in its prestigious “Meridiani” series in two deluxe volumes. But over the last decade another “caso Silone”

¹⁶ Iris Origo, *A Need to Testify* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 312.

¹⁷ The documents have been reproduced by a Swiss scholar and are available online at www.peterkamber.ch/ignazio.html

has darkened his reputation. In 1996, Italian historian Dario Biocca uncovered documents supposedly proving that Silone had been spying for the fascist secret police. Over the next few years, new revelations appeared in the press and academic journals. Apparently, Silone had spent nearly a decade in an epistolary exchange with a high-ranking police official in Rome. Once again, Silone was at the center of political, literary, and cultural scandal.

This latest “caso Silone” did not arise in a vacuum. Silone had not been a stranger to controversy in life. Perhaps the ur-scandal was his class betrayal: for although he and his family were petit bourgeois, owning some properties in the Fucino plain of the Marsica region in Abruzzo, he cast his lot with the *cafoni* all over the world in their myriad guises. As his alter ego Pietro Spina muses in a letter “perhaps the real cause of my distress is my defiance of the ancient law, my way of living in cafés, libraries, hotels, my having broken the chain that for centuries linked my forefathers to the soil.”¹⁸ Later, there followed another scandal in his expulsion from the PCI in 1931 and his subsequent exile in Switzerland. Although his 1933 novel, *Fontamara*, was a critical and commercial success, there was the scandal of his writing’s critical reception in Italy, where, upon returning from exile in 1944, he faced a domestic, literary ostracization that was no less devastating than his physical exile.

For decades, the classically trained literary establishment refused to countenance Silone’s work. It was said that he didn’t write “proper Italian.” He was often passed over for major literary awards. His subject matter—the rural Abruzzo and the *cafoni*—were considered beneath “proper” literature by the conservative establishment while the cultural elites of the left, dominated by the PCI, could not forget his expulsion from the party in 1931 nor forgive his criticism of communism during the Cold War. When his account of disillusionment with communism, “Emergency Exit,” appeared in Richard Crossman’s anthology *The God that Failed* in 1950, Silone was mercilessly criticized by his former comrades and when that essay became the central piece in an autobiographical volume, *Uscita di sicurezza* (*Emergency Exit*, 1965), the communist-dominated committee of the prestigious Viareggio Prize refused to accept it for consideration, thus generating further controversy (the book was

¹⁸ Silone, *Bread and Wine*, 260.

awarded the Marzotto Prize instead). Italian critics began to ask themselves why it was that Silone was so prized abroad and so derided at home. As the American scholar Michael P. McDonald has written, it was a classic case of *Nemo propheta acceptus est patria sua*.¹⁹ Contemporary neofascists (or postfascists as they like to fashion themselves) as well as paleo-communists are loath to forget Silone's "betrayal": his effective demolition of their precious and precarious myths.

The most recent scandal, that Silone was engaged in a decade-long spying operation against his comrades in the Italian Communist Party, has come to overshadow everything else, calling into question as it does Silone's status as a reluctant secular saint of the independent Left in Europe, a persona that Silone worked hard to implant in the public imagination. In Silone's second novel, *Bread and Wine*, Don Benedetto reads from an old essay of Pietro Spina's: "But for the fact that it would be very boring to be exhibited on altars after one's death, to be prayed to and worshiped by a lot of unknown people, mostly ugly old women, I should like to be a saint."²⁰ But surely he would have echoed Dorothy Day's retort: "Don't call me a saint; I don't want to be dismissed so easily."²¹ And it was George Orwell, to whom Silone has often been compared, who wrote "saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent,"²² a sentiment that surely would have provoked a wry smile and a knowing nod from the Italian writer. "Silone was the man of capital letters," his wife recalled, "he used to write the word 'verità' with a capital 'V'; 'libertà' with a capital 'L'. But his lowercase character was mysterious and unknowable."²³

Silone was shaped by the forces of heresy in daring to challenge certain Marxist and Stalinist "truths," exile in Switzerland, and the twin tragedies of a failed politics and a disillusionment with the Catholic Church. In the 1920s, as a major figure of the international commu-

¹⁹ "No prophet is accepted in his own country." Luke 4:24. See McDonald's essay on the most recent controversy, "Il Caso Silone," in *The National Interest*, Fall 2001, 77–89.

²⁰ Silone, *Bread and Wine*, 201.

²¹ Quoted in James Martin, "Don't Call me a Saint?" *America*, November 14, 2012, <https://www.americamagazine.org/>.

²² George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," in *Partisan Review*, January 1949.

²³ Michele Dorigatti and Maffino Maghenzani, *Darina Laracy Silone: Colloqui* (Verona: Perosini Editore, 2005), 87–88.

nist movement, Silone refused to accept the orthodoxy of Stalin's cult and suffered the fate of the heretic, excommunicated from the Marxist Church. Broken, disillusioned, near death according to his doctors, and contemplating suicide, Silone retreated to Davos, Switzerland where he began composing his most famous work, *Fontamara*, literally "Bitter Spring." The book's "unforeseen and unforeseeable" success "made me a writer," he recalled forty years later.²⁴ Like a long line of Italian intellectuals before him, from Dante to Machiavelli, from Mazzini to Garibaldi, exile transformed Silone into an entirely new person. He was ostracized by the communists and hunted by the fascists. Rather than the relatively congenial exile of bohemian Paris, Silone chose austere, Protestant Zurich. He was accused of failing to change with literary taste, of refusing to accommodate the whims of the reading public; of writing the same book over and over again. But as his close friend and colleague the Polish writer Gustaw Herling wrote about him, "Anyone who is deeply convinced that he is saying something important is not ashamed to say things more than once. The secret is the gravity of the words, and what gives words their gravity is their unceasing vigilance."²⁵ Herling, who had settled in Naples in 1955, would confide that Silone was "truly a man who kept secrets and did not speak much."²⁶

It was this existential status as an outsider and exile—even after returning to Italy—that marked his life and work. An interviewer once noted a certain "Erasmian component" to his personality. But an Erasmus plucked from the aristocratic Renaissance and dropped into the industrial age, "not afraid to get his hands dirty in peasant revolts." This was an Erasmus which rendered Silone "a citizen of an invisible world community of free men, not very numerous, but united by cultural ties." This Italian had no homeland.²⁷ Indeed, Silone claimed no

²⁴ Silone to Mariapia Bonanate, January 1973, Archivio Silone, Florence, busta 10, fascicolo 1.

²⁵ Gustaw Herling, "Rome, December 2" [Ignazio Silone] in *Volcano and Miracle: A Selection From the Journal Written at Night*, translated by Ronald Strom (New York: Penguin, 1996), 28.

²⁶ "L'avventura di un povero cristiano e di un povero socialista," in *ISRS*, vol. 1, xii.

²⁷ Interview with Ugo Alfassio Grimaldi in "Alcune domande a un francotiratore del socialismo," in *Critica Sociale*, November 20, 1965; reprinted in *ISRS*, vol. 2, 1273.

other citizenship except that of this “imagined communion” with peasants and workers around the world, so different from the “imagined communities” of nationalism.

Silone’s personal traumas (the loss of his father, the death of his mother in an earthquake, his precarious physical and mental health, his brother’s imprisonment and death; his “spying”) inevitably left their marks but were only obliquely played out in his work. It was only the public trauma of expulsion from the PCI that was explicit in his writing. “There is a secret in my life,” he once confessed in an interview, “it is written between the lines of my books.”²⁸ His struggle with demons, private and public, may not have been as obvious as in the case of other intellectuals to whom he has often been compared, such as Sartre or Camus or Orwell, yet it was no less dramatic. His story is, in short, a modernist tragedy.

Silone represents a special genre of intellectual: passionately committed to a political ideology that eventually proves illusory; in the light of that failure desperately attempting not to succumb to nihilism; perhaps morally compromised by a relationship to the very powers of oppression; caught in a Sisyphean task of political liberation in a century that placed all the powers of modern mass communication, technology, and violence in the hands of totalitarian states.

“The life of a revolutionary,” Silone wrote more than a decade after his expulsion from the communist movement, “is much more difficult, dangerous and full of pitfalls than that of a Nietzschean hero.” It was dangerous for example, to go forth into battle “without being completely truthful with oneself, down to the depths of one’s soul.”²⁹

In Silone’s recounting of his experience as a communist, the May 1927 meeting in Moscow of the Executive Committee of the Communist International is pivotal. Thinking that they had arrived late, Silone and Palmiro Togliatti found themselves in the midst of a discussion denouncing Leon Trotsky for a certain document (Trotsky’s critical analysis of the situation in China) and the drafting of a resolution to expel the Russian. When Silone naively asked to read the supposedly

²⁸ Silone’s interview was broadcast on Italian television, Rai Educational, “La Storia Siamo Noi,” on February 28, 2004; I am indebted to Romolo Tranquilli for providing me with a videotaped copy of the program.

²⁹ Silone, “Le idee che sostengo,” in *ISRS*, vol. 1, 1389.

incriminating document, he was told it was not possible and he was astonished to learn that no one of the Executive Committee had read it either. When the two Italians refused to condemn Trotsky for a document that neither of them had seen, the meeting was adjourned to the next day. The Executive Committee appointed the Bulgarian Kolarov to convince Silone and Togliatti. The two were invited for tea at the Hotel Lux that night. After admitting to them that he himself had not seen the document, but that "documents have nothing to do with it," he stated simply: "We have to choose . . . we're not in an academy here. Have I made myself clear?" he asked, looking straight at Silone. "Yes," Silone answered, "perfectly clear." "Have I persuaded you?" asked Kolarov. "No," was Silone reply. "Why not?" Kolarov wanted to know. "I'd have to explain," Silone concluded, "why I'm against fascism."³⁰

The next day, when the two Italians still refused to condemn Trotsky, Stalin smiled and simply withdrew the motion from vote. But Silone and Togliatti were astonished to read in a newspaper picked up the next day on the train ride back to Berlin that the Executive Committee of the Communist International had "unanimously" condemned comrade Trotsky for betrayal.³¹

For the next two years, Silone continued in carrying out important tasks within the PCI but with increasing disgust. In the summer of 1929, he requested and was granted a leave absence for medical reasons but it would be another two years before he was expelled and finally free.

Silone's expulsion from the Communist Party in June 1931 was the culmination of a long, drawn-out political and psychological battle that left an indelible stigma on his public persona and trauma on his private self. The dispute revolved around the changing tactical and strategic thinking of both the Communist International and the PCI. Orders from Moscow were that the social democrats were now

³⁰ The episode, recounted in "Emergency Exit," 74–75, is corroborated by Togliatti, with some minor variations in *L'Unità*, January 6, 1950: "It generally really went as Silone relates." Togliatti and Silone reported to the leadership of the PCI a few weeks later (April 1927), documents preserved in the Archivio Antonio Gramsci in Rome and reproduced in Antonio Gasbarrini and Annibale Gentile, *Ignazio Silone, comunista 1921–1931* (L'Aquila: Angelus Novus Edizioni, 1989), 201–36.

³¹ Silone, "Emergency Exit," 82–83.

to be referred to as “social fascists” and that communist parties were to increase their domestic networks in preparation for a soon-to-be-expected collapse of the bourgeois order. Writing from Switzerland, on January 15, 1930, Silone (as “Pasquini”) committed his position to a memorandum: with an implied critique of the “social fascism” theory, he argued that returning to underground activity in Italy would be “suicidal.” Togliatti was furious, condemning Silone as an opportunist whose position would lead to a “liquidation of the party.”³²

Silone found himself on difficult terrain: a rejection of state socialism, reform socialism, democratic socialism, and Marxist orthodoxy and an attempt to reestablish the moral and ethical foundations of a humanistic socialism. The necessity of finding his voice in exile did not go unremarked by Silone. “The young people of my generation,” he wrote many years later, “were forced to find an echo of their most intimate anxieties in foreign authors . . . and we wondered as to why there was such a silence regarding our contemporary problems in contemporary Italian authors. It was not just because of censorship, but rather self-censorship.” For Silone, Italian writers, from the Renaissance on, with precious few exceptions, were “an ornament of society,” not an essential fact of reality. “The fundamental themes of conscience were avoided.”³³

On June 20, 1930, Palmiro Togliatti (“Ercoli”) sent Silone (“Pasquini”) a letter stating that the party had decided on asking Silone for a public declaration. They demanded that Silone publicly condemn Trotskyism and state “absolute fealty to the party and the International.” Togliatti’s threat was not subtle: “I hope you don’t want to follow the road the others have taken.” Two months later, after failing to receive a reply, Togliatti tried again: “So far we have not received anything from you, neither a declaration nor even a suggestion of a declaration. . . . The struggle against the opportunists, the enemies and disintegrators of the party is something that is beyond any possible discussion.”³⁴

To another party member, Romano Cocchi, Silone quoted Stendahl: “Dream of not spending your life in hate and fear.” Silone

³² E. H. Carr, “The Italian Communist Party,” in *Twilight of the Comintern 1930–1935* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 239, 255.

³³ “Al colloquio con Silone,” in *Il Messaggero*, August 22, 1966.

³⁴ Ercoli (Togliatti) to Pasquino (Silone), June 20 and August 5, 1930; Archivio Silone, Florence, busta 1, fascicolo 1.

boasted of having no fear, “of any kind,” only of a “horror of creating victims” with his expulsion. From Cocchi he asked, “Don’t you understand that your zeal is, at the very least, inhuman and sadistic?”³⁵ (Perhaps Cocchi did belatedly understand, for he later condemned the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and was himself expelled from the PCI. Arrested while fighting with the French *maquis*, he was sent to Buchenwald where he perished.)

Togliatti and Ruggero Grieco struggled for more than a year to keep Silone in the party; when it became obvious that their efforts would bear no fruit, they turned to threats. Silone, for his part, walked out of a meeting of a commission chaired by Grieco examining his case. During the course of this session, Silone was accused of a myriad offenses: refusal to collaborate with the current direction of the PCI; refusal to enter in the party apparatus; his “arrogant and impudent” bearing; the fact that he burst into scornful laughter at every mention of the doctrine of “social fascism,” that he was not an “internationalist,” but an “Italian,” and, worse yet, a southern Italian; in fact, his “contadinismo” (advocacy for the peasants) was a grave theoretical error. “These were the charges against me,” he wrote to Angelo Tasca, “but they probably won’t be the public charges against me in the act of expulsion. Those are not difficult to imagine: traitor, deserter, etc.” The only thing that Silone and the commission could agree upon was that he had a different ideology from the party, that even his language was different from that of the party, “that we speak and yet we fail to understand each other.”³⁶ But by the summer of 1931, the case, as far as the party was concerned, was closed. Silone was fully prepared now for the consequences; fully conscious that one never freely resigned from the Party but could only be expelled,³⁷ he wrote to Tasca that he now felt “ripe” for expulsion.³⁸

³⁵ Silone to Adami (Romano Cocchi), Zurich, May 30, 1931. Archivio Silone, Florence, busta 1, fascicolo 1.

³⁶ Silone to Tasca, June 24, 1931, in David Bidussa, “Dialogato per un rinnovamento socialista. Un carteggio degli anni Trenta tra Ignazio Silone e Angelo Tasca,” in *Annali 1985–1986. L’Irpinia nella società meridionale* (Avellino: Edizioni del Centro Dorso, 1986), 637.

³⁷ “Communist parties do not tolerate resignations. They recognize only expulsions.” Silone, *Emergency Exit*, 95.

³⁸ Silone to Tasca, June 24, 1931.

Summoned one last time before the PCI in July 1931, Silone admitted, according to an official party communiqué, to being an example of the “political underworld,” an “abnormal politician,” and “a clinical case.” “There is no place in the ranks of the Party,” thundered the announcement, “for softheaded intellectuals such as Pasquini.” The vote to expel him was, of course, unanimous.³⁹

As Silone and Tasca discovered together, expulsion from the PCI was both a blessing and a curse. As Silone had compared joining a revolutionary party to entering a monastery, (“An outlawed revolutionary,” says Pietro Spina, “is in the ideal state of a Christian in a monastery”⁴⁰), he likened the “traumatic” situation of the excommunist with that of the exmonk. Leaving the communist party, he wrote, “is like a small death” (*una piccolo morte*).⁴¹ Ironically, Silone rediscovered that which he was seeking in the party—“a genuine rapport with others”—only after he had been expelled.

With the passage of time, he could reflect on how he had misconceived politics. There were limits as to what one could achieve through politics, “on that score I had no illusions.” Equally important was his perhaps cynical conclusion that to work in politics “for any motive other than the pursuit of personal power must surely demand a certain measure of self-deception, of deliberately closing one’s eyes to the truth.”⁴² Again he turned to the metaphor of the wolves in searching for answers. The fate of socialism, he wrote, was comparable to the hunter who went hunting for quail, only to find himself beset by wolves. “In the struggle with the wolves, to save ourselves some of us were obliged to . . . rediscover our paleo-Christian heritage.”⁴³ The fate of Marxism convinced him that there was no revolutionary theory that could not be used for reactionary ends. What had survived of Marxism

³⁹ “L’espulsione di Pasquini dale file dell’I.C.” *Lo Stato Operaio*, July 1931, 362–65. No official record of the meeting at which Silone was expelled has been published. For Togliatti’s version of events, see his *Opere*, vol. III, (Rome: Riuniti, 1973), 341–53.

⁴⁰ *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, in Silone, *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, 585.

⁴¹ Silone, “The Situation of the ‘Ex,’” 101. It is unlikely that Silone—famously shy of sexuality in his writing—was consciously evoking the French *le petite mort*.

⁴² “Rethinking Progress,” in Silone, *Emergency Exit*, 58.

⁴³ Silone, “The Situation of the ‘Ex,’” 107, 108.

was its ideological critique which was paradoxically both “a tragically cold technocracy” and “essentially humanist.” But as History was the mother of Irony, Silone speculated that one day we would arrive at the aphorism that “Marxism is the opiate of the people.”⁴⁴

More than thirty years after his expulsion, it was still painful for him to recount that period in his life. The slow realization that the Soviet regime was the exact opposite of what it claimed (and what Silone believed it) to be came almost as a sickness, a medical crisis, as well as an intellectual one. When oppression, censorship, “absurd persecutions and ruthless tyranny” became obvious and no longer aberrations but systemic, Silone found himself in a “tragic dilemma.” It was impossible to remain subject to such degradation but also impossible to cut the ties with men and women of good faith who were struggling against fascism.⁴⁵

In 1962, Silone and his wife Darina made a pilgrimage of sorts to the Holy Land. They had taken the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and found themselves in a barren valley bereft of any trees, shrubs, plants, or flowers. There was no sign of water or human life. But near Bethlehem they came upon a woman dressed all in black, carrying a child and riding a dusty, grey donkey. The three silent figures passed Silone and his wife without so much as a glance in their direction. The vision created in Silone a particular state of mind and he was silent for a long time. Although he had never been in this part of the world, he had the distinct impression that he had already seen and lived this panorama. It was Darina who after a long while broke the silence pointing out to her husband that this was the landscape of his novels. It was a revelation. “I saw once again, outside of myself, something that I had carried within me for years, perhaps since birth: the landscape of my soul.”⁴⁶ In this landscape, bread, wine, wolves, donkeys, and water all held potent grip over his imagination, both in their literal and symbolic manifestations. Water in all its forms—from fountains

⁴⁴ Silone, “Le idee che sostengo,” 1389.

⁴⁵ “Parliamo di me,” *Il resto di Carlino*, January 18, 1963; reprinted in *ISRS*, vol. 2, 1257.

⁴⁶ “Restare se stesso,” *Il Resto di Carlino*, January 20, 1963; reprinted in *ISRS*, vol. 2, 1264–65. Darina Silone recounts the episode in Dorigatti and Maghenzani, *Colloqui*, 88–89.

and springs to snow and tears—is always critical in his work. (One is reminded of Picasso’s famous remark: “I went to communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water.”⁴⁷) In Silone’s work, towns and people have names like Acquisanta, Acquaviva (literally “living water”) or Pietrasecca (“dry stone”) indicating their interior life. The cover of his last work was graced with Giotto’s fresco of “The Miracle of the Spring,” depicting St. Francis of Assisi in prayer while a fellow pilgrim quenches his thirst nearby. But “if the spring is not clear,” declares one of Silone’s protagonists, “I refuse to drink.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Quoted in Michael Scammell, *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009), 428.

⁴⁸ Rocco De Donatis in Silone, *A Handful of Blackberries*, 168.

NIKOS MARANTZIDIS

*Greek Intellectuals and the Fascination
with Communism:
The Graft that Did Not Blossom
(1924–1949)*

The relationship between totalitarian movements and intellectuals in the twentieth century has been expansive and complicated. Thousands of intellectuals in every part of the European continent were ready to sacrifice their career and even their lives for the cause of some earthly paradise. Some of them went as far as playing leading roles in the formation, propagation, and organization of these teleological movements. During the interwar period, fascism and communism benefited from the support of intellectuals who became their elites, thus contributing in a decisive manner to the launch of such movements across the continent.

No other ideological and political movements were as dependent on intellectuals as socialist ones and particularly communism. In countries such as France, the participation of intellectuals in the communist party and the other extreme left-wing organizations was so important that, for almost half a century, it fuelled the near identification of intellectuals with utopianism and communism.¹ As it was pointed out in early postwar period, “in every country in which there is a communist party, large segments of the party elite’s ‘hard core’ of professional revolutionaries have been drawn not from the ranks of the proletariat, but from the ranks of the bourgeois, particularly the intellectual bourgeois.”²

¹ David Caute, *Le Communisme et les intellectuels français, 1941–1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party, Disillusion and Decline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

² Herbert E. Krugman, “The appeal of Communism to American Middle Class Intellectuals and Trade-Unionists,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1952, 16 (3): 331.

The case of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) has not been an exception. Since the 1920s and up to the 1980s, a significant number of party members have been drawn from the ranks of middle-class intellectuals.³ Many other intellectuals were also followers and voluntary propagandists of the party's ideals. It was a common perception in the country that the term "intellectual" was synonymous with socialist and communist attitudes and values. One needs to introduce two caveats though to such generalization. First, this relationship has not remained constant over time. It fluctuated in close connection with international and national historical circumstances as well as with the different choices made by communist organizations and the international communist center itself—Moscow. Second, despite the presence of individuals with substantial intellectual scope, the KKE never had the privilege to count amongst its own a personality comparable to Louis Althusser or Jean-Paul Sartre in France, Antonio Gramsci in Italy, György Lukács or Béla Kun in Hungary, Ana Pauker in Romania, or to Lenin or Trotsky in Russia.

The KKE and Intellectuals: From Foundation to the War (1924–1941)

Prior to the creation of the Communist Party—as the Socialist Labor Party of Greece (SEKE)⁴ was renamed in 1924—the main socialist initiatives involved small groups of intellectuals rather than an extensive and well-structured entity such as a political party.⁵ Several of the party's founders had studied in Europe and had been influenced by revolutionary movements encountered during their stay at western and central European universities. Another group of intellectuals belonged

³ I use the term *intellectual* in its broader sense denoting people whose professional involvement is associated with the production, reproduction, or dissemination of ideas (scholars, authors, journalists, artists, students, etc).

⁴ The SEKE was founded in November 1918 and was affiliated with the Communist International in 1920. See Aggelos Elefantis, *I epagelia tis adinatis epanastasis. KKE kai astismos sto mesopolemo* (Athens: Themelio, 1976), 23.

⁵ Mihalis Dimitriou, *To elliniko sosialistiko kinima. Apo tous outopistes stous Marxistes* (Athens: Plethron, 1985).

to the Jewish community of Salonika.⁶ Their influence on the emerging Greek working class was insignificant. In the summer of 1910, the socialists themselves, in a report to the International Socialist Bureau (ISB), presented the situation almost disappointingly: “Greek workers hardly concern themselves with their unions. The Orthodox clergy exerts great influence on the masses of Greek workers.”⁷

TABLE 1. THE LEADING REPRESENTATIVES OF GREEK SOCIALISM PRIOR TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (1924)

Name	Profession
Rokos Hoidas	magistrate
Stavros Kallergis	architect
Platon Drakoulis	university professor
Nikos Yannios	journalist
Georgios Skliros	physician
Konstantinos Hadjopoulos	writer
Abraham Mpenaroyia (Avraam Benaroya)	teacher
Aristotelis Sideris	attorney at law & university professor
Yannis Petsopoulos	journalist
Dimosthenis Ligdopoulos	university student
Yannis Kordatos	historian
Panayotis Dimitratos	teacher
Nikos Dimitratos	law student
Spyros Koumiotis	university student

⁶ Dimosthenis Dodos, *Oi Evraioi vouleptes stis ekloges tou ellinikou kratous* (Athens: Savvalas, 2005). Leon Nar, *Oi Israelites vouleptes sto elliniko koinovoulío 1915–1936* (Athens: Idryma tis Voulis ton Ellinon, 2011).

⁷ Georgios V. Leontaritis, *To elliniko sosialistiko kinima kata ton proto pagkosmio polemo* (Athens: Exandas, 1978), 29.

The affiliation of the SEKE to the Communist International in 1920 and the subsequent foundation of the KKE in 1924 gradually changed the composition of the Party's social base. However, during all the years of the interwar period and up to the Metaxas dictatorship (August 1936), the KKE remained a marginal political party with a small, but nonetheless increasing electoral influence.

TABLE 2. KKE ELECTORAL RESULTS IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Election	Number of votes	%
1926	41,982	4.3
1928	23,889	2.8
1932	58,223	4.9
1936	73,411	5.7

The Bolshevization of the Party had a negative effect on its relations with the country's intellectuals. The wave of ongoing internal purges caused the withdrawal of many of those socialist intellectuals who had founded the Party.⁸ It was clear that the KKE was a totally different party to the SEKE. If the latter was a transparent party with multiple factions that contended publicly about the future political line of the party, the KKE was a product created on the norms of the Comintern. Democratic centralism imposed a rigid discipline, unbearable for a great number of intellectuals, who argued for freedom of speech and thought.

The Party's new outlook generated the dwindling of the number of intellectuals and educated people within its ranks. Generally, the presence of intellectuals in the party ranks was unimportant. According to the data of the CPG itself in 1933, 54% of its members were farmers, 42% manual workers, 1% white-collar employees, and 2% people of various professional backgrounds.⁹ We can assume that the majority of that "various" 2% were intellectuals. Apart from the meager numer-

⁸ Elephfantis, *I epagelia tis adinatis epanastasis*, 368.

⁹ KKE, *Epissima Keimena* (Athens: Sighroni Epohi, 1981), tome 3, 473.

ical presence of middle-class intellectuals in the party ranks, their marginalization could also be observed in other ways. Looking at their role in the formation of party policy we realize that they had a secondary function. In fact, the main directives came from the higher echelons of the Comintern. Intellectuals functioned as mere translators.

In general, the expanding KKE membership among Greek intellectuals was not a priority for the Party. As outlined in the decision of the KKE Central Commission in 1934: "The development of the Party can be healthy only if it is primarily on account of the pioneers of factory workers, and on behalf of farm workers and poor farmers."¹⁰ The deafening silence in this pronouncement regarding urban middle classes and intellectuals was characteristic of this phase of the KKE's history.

Despite the anti-intellectual laborism of the CPG, communism as an ideological force gained important influence among the more educated strata of Greek society during the interwar period. The myth that a new world was being created from scratch in the Soviet Union, where social justice and equality prevailed, and a new social experience was set in motion, fascinated a significant number of educated people. Even if these newcomers to the world of communism did not feel the need to participate within the ranks of the communist party, they were sympathetic to the idea of establishing the first Greek socialist state.

Bolshevik propaganda about the socialist paradise succeeded in nudging some educated people and middle-class intellectuals into party ranks during the interwar years. Among them, some succeeded in reaching the higher ranks of the party. Indeed, by observing the leading group of the KKE during the interwar period, we realize that it comprised a small but not entirely insignificant group of intellectuals (7 out of 27). It is essential, however, to highlight the fact that three of them were teachers, that is, low-prestige intellectuals with influence particularly in rural areas, where they worked and enjoyed local support or admiration.

The most emblematic case among this group was, undoubtedly, that of teacher Nikos Ploumbidis. Born at the beginning of the century (1902), he studied at the Pedagogical Academy and was appointed

¹⁰ KKE, *Epissima Keimena*, tome 4, 33.

teacher in a rural area, the region of Thessaly in central Greece. There he embraced radical political activity as propaganda agitator.¹¹ He was also an activist in the teachers' union and he ascended the hierarchy of the civil servants' association. He was driven out from his post in 1931, brought to trial and imprisoned for disseminating communist and separatist ideas. In 1938 he became a member of the KKE Politburo. During the Civil War, he assumed leadership of the illegal party organization in Athens. This was a very risky position because he was accused of espionage by the Greek authorities. Finally, he was arrested in 1952, sentenced for espionage by a military court, and executed in 1954.

**TABLE 3. INTELLECTUALS IN THE
KKE LEADING GROUP DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS
(TOTAL OF THE LEADING GROUP 27 PERSONS)**

Profession
3 teachers (Daskalopoulos, Zevgos, Ploumbidis)
1 lawyer (Porfyrogenis)
1 journalist (Roussos)
2 university students (Partsalidis, Striggos)

Source: Aggelos Elefantis, *I epagelia tis adinatis epanastasis*.

In general, intellectuals as adherents of the Greek communist party were not distinguished for any kind of independent thinking or intellectual creativity. In essence, their intellectual work mainly concerned the promotion of party propaganda. The majority wrote articles in party newspapers, copied from the international communist press or they assumed activist functions inside some public servant associations (teachers, professors, public servants, etc.). There are however a few exceptions, cases with more significant intellectual work than the steadfast reproduction of party directives. They, although unable to

¹¹ Nikos Marantzidis, *Oi 'Mikres Mosxes': Politiki kai eklogiki analysi tis parousias tou kommounismou ston elladiko agrotiko horo* (Athens: Papazisis, 1997), 222–23.

deeply influence party identity, nonetheless remained in the communist collective memory as something exceptional in the history of the party. Three examples were defining for the latter: the historian Yannis Kordatos, the lawyer and first KKE Secretary, Pantelis Pouliopoulos, and university professor and author Dimitris Glinos.

Yannis Kordatos (born 1891) was a typical Greek socialist intellectual of the early decades of the twentieth century. He is considered the founding father of Marxist historiography in Greece. He studied at the Law School of the University of Athens. In the course of his studies, he joined the socialist movement and then became a founding member of the SEKE. He was Party Secretary between 1920 and 1924. He was expelled from the party in 1927 because of his disagreement with the position on independent Macedonia imposed upon the CPG by the Comintern and the Balkan Communist Federation.¹²

The second case is that of Pantelis Pouliopoulos (born 1900). He also studied at the Faculty of Law. He served in the Greek army during the Asia Minor War, from 1919 to 1922. He was active in the anti-war movement organized and directed by the SEKE. Following the end of the war, he participated in associations of former combatants whose goals were to radicalize former soldiers and initiate them in the directives of the Third International. Pouliopoulos made a major contribution to the Bolshevization of the SEKE, to its attachment to the Comintern, and to its transformation into a communist party. His leading role in this process was recognized when he was elected general secretary of the KKE in 1924. Later on, during the factional struggles inside the communist party of Greece—these struggles were, in fact, a direct reflection of what happened in the USSR at that time—he was cast out as a Trotskyist in 1927. Pouliopoulos along with other dissidents of the communist party created the Greek Communist Internationalist Organization, a minuscule Trotskyist party without significant political influence. Pouliopoulos lost his life in 1943. He was executed

¹² Yannis Milios, *I exelixi ton antilipseon tis kommounistikis Aristeras gia ton elliniko kapitalismo. I periptossi tou Yianni Kordatou* (Athens: Theseis, 1994), 49:61–83. Alekos Papapanagiotou, *To makedoniko zitima kai to Valkaniko kommounistiko kinima 1918–1939* (Athens: Themelio, 1992). Vagelis Karamanolakis, “Enas kommounistis dianooomenos sto mesopolemo” *Eleftherotypia/Vivliothiki* vol. 161 (August 2001): 161–74.

by the Italian occupation forces in retaliation for blowing up the Gorgopotamos Bridge as part of the Greek resistance.¹³

Dimitris Glinos (born 1882) played a significant role in the Greek communist movement during the years 1924–1949. He was a key figure in the history of Greek public education, as he made several attempts to institute reform in the Greek educational system.¹⁴ He studied philosophy and sociology in Germany. He worked as a teacher, as senior manager in public administration, and then as a professor at the Faculty of Education. He is best known for his reformist ideas on educational issues.¹⁵ Unlike Kordatos and Pouliopoulos, Glinos was not a member of the Communist Party from its foundation. His early ideological positions were closer to social democracy. He shifted towards communism in the 1930s, most probably as a reaction to the severe destitution brought upon Europe and Greece by the economic crisis of 1929–32. He was elected representative to the Parliament for the KKE in 1936. A turning point of his political activity is thought to be the drafting of the ideological manifesto of the KKE-controlled resistance organisation EAM (National Liberation Front) in 1942, which was entitled *What EAM Is and What It Pursues*. Generally speaking, his intellectual intervention during the German occupation was central to KKE's successful penetration to the ranks of intellectuals, especially teachers, professors, and educated young people.¹⁶

The aforementioned personalities delineate three different intellectual itineraries within the communist movement. The first is that of intellectuals who were radicalised in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. They participated in minor socialist groups essentially consisting of individuals who had contacts with western and central Europe. Later on, they took part in the foundation of the Communist Party. A significant number of these intellectuals disagreed with the profound Bolshevization and Stalinization of the party or the Comin-

¹³ Dimitris Livieratos, *Pantelis Pouliopoulos* (Athens: Glaros, 1992).

¹⁴ Marie Iliou, "Dimitris Glinos 1882–1943," *Prospects: the Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* vol. 23, no. 3/4, (2000): 559.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dimitris Glinos, *Arthra kai meletes tou Dimitri Glinou stin paranomi "Kommounistiki Epitehorissi" tis Germanikis Katohis* (Athens: Sihroni Epohi, 2008).

tern's interference in the Party's decision-making process. Therefore, they either quit or were expelled.

The second type of intellectual turned to radicalism during World War I and the Asia Minor campaign. Some participated as soldiers on the front, a situation which contributed to the formation of vigorous antiwar stances. It is precisely this group of people who declared themselves in favor of the party's adherence to the Third International and contributed to the creation of the Communist Party. This tendency was highly internationalist. It was not a coincidence that several of them supported Trotsky in his conflict with Stalin. Of course, Greek Trotskyism never became a major movement. It had an impact mainly on small groups of workers and a minority of intellectuals. Of the latter, the most characteristic case was that of philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. Another famous Greek who was a member of a Trotskyist organisation—even if only for a brief period—was Andreas Papan-dreou, professor of Economics at Berkeley University in the 1950s and later prime minister of Greece during the 1980s and 1990s.

The third group represented the most typical instance of the successful grafting of intellectuals onto Greek Communism. This is the case of those who were radicalised in the early 1930s during the Popular Front line of the Comintern. They were not necessarily integrated into the communist party. A significant factor that fuelled their support of the KKE was the party's role in the Resistance during the years 1941–1944. This group joined the KKE mainly with nationalist rather than internationalist criteria.

In conclusion, as regards the interwar period, we can say that the relationship between communism and Greek intellectuals went through several phases: although they were actively involved in disseminating socialist ideas in the late nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, many subsequently repudiated the Communist Party. The presence of intellectuals in the party during the years 1920–1940 can be described as sluggish. This is attributed to three main factors: first, KKE policies relating to the Macedonian issue. This had been a burning issue in the Balkans since the late nineteenth century. Three different nationalisms (Bulgarian, Yugoslav, and Greek) placed tremendous symbolic importance on the appropriation of the Ottoman Empire's Macedonian territories, each claiming them for themselves. The two Balkan Wars in 1912–1913 resolved the issue

through violence. The Comintern and the Balkan Communist Federation adopted the position of creating a unified and independent Macedonian State, which would result from the secession of Macedonian territories by the three Balkan states. The imposition of the Comintern view on the Greek Communist Party in 1924 had a devastating impact on the image of the Party in Greek society, which now perceived it to be a “Slavophilic” party, a pawn in the hands of foreign powers.¹⁷ Though the KKE changed its decision on the matter a few years later, the damage had been done.

The second reason was the passing of special, highly repressive laws against communist activities. In 1929, upon the recommendation of the Government of Liberal prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos, the Act on “security measures for the social status and the protection of civil liberties” was adopted by the Parliament.¹⁸ According to this legal document, penalties of up to two years of imprisonment or exile were inflicted upon those who propagandized ideas advocating the violent overthrow of the regime or secession of part of the country (an apparent reference to the Macedonian issue).

And third, the full Bolshevization of the Party alienated many intellectuals. By faithfully applying the twenty-one conditions of the Communist International, KKE had, since 1924, followed policies promoting its Bolshevization. The process took several years, during which the Party was shaken by ferocious factional struggles.¹⁹ This resulted in the Party finding itself entirely detached from an important section of the socialist, but not communist, Greek intelligentsia, who had been sympathetic to it for some time. Particularly devastating was, in this respect, the imposition of a political line of social-fascism during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

¹⁷ Papanagiotou, *To makedoniko zitima*, 66–109.

¹⁸ Nikos Marantzidis, “I epanodos stin exousia,” in *Eleftherios Venizelos*, ed. by Thanos Veremis and Ilias Nikolakopoulos (Athens: Ta Nea, 2011), 163–66.

¹⁹ Elefantis, *I epagelia tis adinatis epanastasis*. George Mavrogordatos, *Still-born Republic. Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece 1922–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 92.

Intellectuals and the KKE during the Occupation and Resistance (1941–1944)

From the establishment of the dictatorship by Ioannis Metaxas on August 4, 1936 until the German invasion of Athens, the KKE, acting under conditions of illegality and persecution, was on the verge of absolute dissolution. With the party leadership in prison or in exile, only a few core cadres of the party remained active. The German invasion of Greece reversed this situation.

The new circumstances brought about by war and occupation, (Greece was divided into three occupation zones: German, Italian and Bulgarian) constituted, as it turned out, a first-rate political opportunity for the KKE. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the German invasion of the USSR during the summer of 1941. At that time, a small circle of leading Comintern figures in Moscow implemented the national front strategy. That strategy was part of the USSR's national security policy and it included three elements: a) conducting guerrilla warfare in the countries occupied by Axis forces, b) the broadest possible mobilization of the population to support armed resistance, and c) the organization of all anti-Nazi forces into a national front movement under the guidance of communists.²⁰

Based on that new line, the KKE attempted to emerge from isolation. In September 1941, on the KKE's own initiative, the National Liberation Front (EAM) was founded. Despite being under the control of the KKE, the ideological program of the organization was deliberately moderate. The EAM appealed to all political forces in the country, both monarchists and antimonarchists, to unite against the Axis forces. The sole crucial political issue raised in the aftermath of the liberation was the restoration of democratic institutions and a referendum on monarchy.

Throughout 1942, "KKE made a vigorous effort to expand its influence under the cloak of EAM." In 1942 and early 1943, the KKE, the leading force within EAM, skillfully exploited the existent circum-

²⁰ Joan Barth Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party* (London: Tauris, 1986), 156–57.

stances.²¹ By the end of the Occupation, EAM was the largest resistance organization. The KKE itself expanded its membership at a frantic pace. According to the Communist Party's official data from April 1945, a few months after the retreat of German troops, party membership in 40 major towns amounted to 73,845 people. That is, they now had more members than the number of votes for the Communist Party in the elections of 1936 throughout Greece.²² In terms of those who joined its ranks, the KKE was virtually a new party. Over two thirds of the membership were integrated after 1941.²³

What exactly was the profile of the intellectuals who were now part of the Communist Party's organization? According to party data, there were 8 intellectuals, 29 scientists, and 11 university students out of 223 delegates at the 7th Party Congress held in October 1945.²⁴ This amounts to approximately 15–20% of total delegates.

Between 1941 and 1944, the KKE significantly expanded into the ranks of the educated and intellectuals. The mobilization of a large number of intellectuals in the service of the organization contributed to the formation of an impressive and comprehensive propaganda mechanism. Thousands of intellectuals, students, teachers, journalists, and writers set off in the pursuit of the party's political goals.

In the student arena, OKNE (Federation of Communist Youth of Greece) and later, since 1943, EPON (United Nationwide Youth Organization), which had constituted the organized youth of EAM, were very strong organizations.²⁵ According to the student union election results of 1943 in Athens, held in a climate of intense polarization between procommunists and anticommunists, the former managed to gain about 40 to 50% of the votes, which indicated a significant communist position inside the student movement at the time.²⁶ The KKE

²¹ George Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat. The Story of the Greek Communist Party* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 150.

²² KKE, *Epissima Keimena*, tome 4, 435.

²³ KKE, *Epissima Keimena*, tome 5, 397.

²⁴ KKE, *Epissima Keimena*, tome 6, 72.

²⁵ Odette Varon-Vasar, *I enilikiosi mias genias. Neoi kai nees stin katohi kai stin antistasi* (Athens: Estia, 2009).

²⁶ Petros Makris Staikos, *Kitos Maltezos. O agapimenos ton theon* (Athens: Okeanida, 2000), 201–202.

derived some of its most important cadres from within the student ranks of the generation that experienced the occupation.

A typical representative of that generation was the subsequent Secretary General of the KKE, Grigoris Farakos. He encountered the communist movement during his studies in the Polytechnic (Engineering) School of Athens. Farakos, joined the party in November 1941 initiated by his communist schoolmate St. Katotakis.²⁷

The sector in which the communist party had significant recruiting success was public education. Hundreds of primary and secondary school teachers were enrolled in its ranks during those years. This development had a positive effect for the party in multiple ways. Communist teachers and professors played a significant role in the development of the KKE. Thanks to their particular social position within the rural community, these teachers were ideally positioned within the population in order to propagate communist ideas in an effective and direct manner.²⁸

Realizing the significant political role of intellectuals in a country with a high percentage of illiteracy, the KKE devoted a remarkable portion of its propaganda work to its effort to enroll educators, especially teachers. Among other things, it organized and held special seminars for them, which were tutored by university professors and other experts, who were members of the Communist Party. Moreover, it printed books and it staged theatrical plays that targeted members of this group with whom they could best interact with.²⁹

The appeal of the procommunist resistance found fertile breeding ground among other types of intellectuals as well: writers, actors, and journalists. A significant number of artists either joined the ranks of the party or extolled communist ideas as fellow-travelers. As everywhere else where communist parties existed, Greek communists invested heavily in written propaganda. In this field of the mass media, a veritable propaganda cosmogony came about. Out of a total of 400 minor as well as major partisan newspapers belonging to various youth orga-

²⁷ Grigoris Farakos, *Martyries kai stohasmoi. 1941–1991, 50 xronia politikis drasis* (Athens: Proskinio, 1993), 21.

²⁸ Veronique Aubert, et al., “La tradition politique des instituteurs,” *Pouvoirs*, 42 (1987): 53–66.

²⁹ Haris Sakellariou, *I Paideia stin Antistasi* (Athens: Filippotis, 1984).

nizations, 65% was created by newspapers of the procommunist youth resistance organization EPON.³⁰ The newspapers of the communist resistance—apart from local news reportage—of course, copied one another and they all reiterated the party line.

By the end of the war, KKE had achieved an impressive expansion of its popularity into such layers of Greek society which had, until then, been extremely resistant to it. As was the case in other countries, World War II managed to establish a new social fantasy that undermined liberal values by promoting violent political practices and cultures.³¹ Armed struggle and heroic sacrifices turned into symbols of the immediate postwar.³² An entire new generation of members was registered in the ranks of the KKE during World War II.

The association of communist ideas with nationalism played a major role in the development of the party. KKE's resolute action within the Resistance, the creation of a widespread resistance network, and the egalitarian dream that would come along with liberation constituted the key factors which contributed to the expansion of KKE's influence. A considerable portion of the intellectual community was part of this new generation of KKE adherents.

However, despite their significant presence within the KKE ranks during the years of occupation and liberation, we should not overestimate the role of intellectuals in the configuration of the party's identity or the drawing up of its policies at the time. Unlike the intellectuals who participated in other political parties, in which their role was frequently decisive in shaping political views and policies, communist intellectuals had a relatively limited role. They mainly specialized in propaganda rather than in decision-making or in drawing up policy.

Indeed, distrust towards intellectuals remained a key feature. For many members of the organization "the prestige of the mentor who came from the working class, even though totally illiterate, was higher than the prestige of the student or the intellectual."³³ According to reports of KKE leading members, the devaluation of the status of

³⁰ Varon-Vasar, *I enilikiosi mias genias*, 474.

³¹ Bernard Bruneteau, *Les totalitarismes* (Paris: Armand Colind, 1999), 104.

³² George Mosse, *La révolution fasciste. Vers une théorie générale du fascisme* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 35.

³³ Varon-Vasar, *I enilikiosi mias genias*, 455.

students was a prevailing trend.³⁴ Suspicion towards intellectuals was reflected in the very composition of the KKE leadership. In October 1945, none of the members of the Politburo could be considered an intellectual. In the broader leadership team, there was only one such individual, the physician Costas Karageorghis, head of *Rizospastis*, the Party newspaper.³⁵

The Civil War (1944–1949)

The Civil War, which took place between 1944 and 1949, led, once again, to the shrinking of the number of intellectuals among the KKE ranks. In this period, due partially to the USSR's new attitude towards the West and the dominance of Andrey Zhdanov's theory of the two camps, the radicalization of party line towards other political forces seriously impacted the relationship of the KKE with Greek intellectuals. The new conditions of the Civil War alienated all those new intellectuals who had been attracted by the nationalist discourse of the party during the occupation. During the Civil War, what prevailed was an aggressive communist rhetoric, such as that which had characterized the party's discourse during the interwar period.

Less than a year after the Battle of Athens between Government troops and the rebellious KKE in December 1944, two hundred young Greek scientists and artists embarked as scholarship students bound for the French state on the *Mataroa*, a New Zealand ship. Among them were many KKE members or adherents—some who had even taken part in the Civil War Battle of Athens. Others included some of the major Greek intellectuals of the postwar period: philosophers Cornelius Castoriadis and Kostas Papaïoannou, philosopher and novelist Mimika Kranaki, film director Manos Zacharias, historian Nikos Svoronos, author writer Elli Alexiou, and composer Ianis Xenakis to name a few.³⁶

³⁴ Farakos, *Martyries kai stohasmoi*, 71. Stavros Kasimatis, *Oi paranomoi. Anthropoi kai dokoumenta* (Athens: Filistor, 1997), 591.

³⁵ KKE, *Epissima Keimena*, tome 6, 129.

³⁶ Nelli Andrikopoulou, *To taxidi tou Mataroa – 1945. Ston kathrepti tis Mnimis* (Athens: Estia, 2008).

In 1946, the KKE adopted armed struggle for the violent take-over of power and shifted its focus away from urban centers to the country's mountains. This resulted in an increase in desertions from the party not only by intellectuals but, more extensively, by the middle class. The guerrilla army of the party, the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE), enlisted, voluntarily or otherwise, about 100,000 people during the period 1946–1949. Of them, 90% were totally illiterate or had not completed elementary school. Only 1–2% had attended university—a percentage 4 times smaller than the average of Greek society at that time.³⁷

Furthermore, the outbreak of the Civil War had the immediate effect of the government adopting an authoritarian legislative framework against the KKE and its adherents. “Emergency Law” No. 509 imposed the death penalty not only for concrete acts of, but also for the attempt, “of seeking to apply ideas aiming manifestly at the overthrow by violent means” of the prevailing political and social order.³⁸ That act also covered deportations to uninhabited arid island camps and dismissals from work in the public sector. Those purges were initiated immediately after the conflict between communists and the government in 1944–1945 in various public sector services. In the universities, the first among the faculty tutors to leave had been Professors Svolos, Angelopoulos, Kokkalis, and Georgalas, all of them prominent EAM members.³⁹

In January 1949, the fifth plenum of the KKE central committee held in the mountain of Vitsi, at the Greek–Albanian border, delivered a catastrophic blow to the communist party's influence among the urban classes. The party leadership decided, just as it had done at one point during the interwar period, to demand the independence of Greek Macedonia. This secessionist declaration had a disastrous impact

³⁷ Nikos Marantzidis, *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas 1946–1949* (Athens: Alexandraia, 2010), 56–57.

³⁸ Nicos C. Alivizatos, “The ‘Emergency Regime’ and Civil Liberties, 1946–1949,” in *Greece in the 1940s. A Nation in Crisis*, ed. by John O. Iatrides (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1981), 224–25.

³⁹ Procopis Papastratis, “The Purge of the Greek Civil Service on the Eve of the Civil War,” in, *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War*, ed. by Lars Baerentzen, John O. Iatrides, and Ole L. Smith (Copenhagen, Tusculanum Press, 1987), 45.

on the party's public image and was, naturally, exploited by the enemies of the KKE in Greece. The party was denounced to be, once again, a slavish, dependent party and an instrument of foreign powers, particularly an alleged instrument for Yugoslavia's and Bulgaria's anti-Greek plans.⁴⁰ This stigma demolished, for years to come, the nationalistic "edifice" that the communist party had built during World War II.

In conclusion, the strengthening of KKE's ranks by middle-class intellectuals between 1941 and 1944, due to its patriotic rhetoric and resolute activity in the Resistance, was hindered by the Civil War. The KKE's recourse to armed rebellion, a new position in 1949 in favor of an independent Macedonia and, finally, repressive governmental measures against its supporters led to intellectuals' withdrawal from its membership. Such rejection seems to represent a failed grafting of communism onto the Greek intelligentsia in the early postwar years. In the 1960s, however, the relationship between communism and intellectuals entered a new phase. But that is another story, as the conditions for triggering an upturn were significantly different (e.g. the activity of the United Democratic Left after 1951, the coming of the colonels' dictatorship from 1966 until 1974, as well as the influence of Third-Worldism).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Marantzidis, *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas*, 60.

⁴¹ Kostis Kornetis, "'Cuban Europe'? Greek and Iberian *tiersmondisme* in the 'Long 1960s,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 486–515.

ANGELO MITCHIEVICI
*Shadows of Paradise:
Romanian Intellectuals and the
Soviet Union*

The advent of the Soviet Union in the wake of Tsarist Russia's collapse entailed not only a change of political paradigm, but also a new kind of relationship between the "USSR continent" and the rest of the world. One of the lenses through which to observe this new connection were the travel accounts by people who experienced the new world for the first time. Martin Malia considered the French Revolution and the October Revolution two fundamental landmarks of the nineteenth and twentieth century respectively.¹ Nothing could mirror better the fascination, often coupled by anxiety, that was prompted by the Soviet experiment than the considerations of various authors on the occasion of their visits to the Land of the Soviets. One of the paradigmatic cases of such ambivalence was the French public official Édouard Herriot, a character who made a tremendous contribution to the resuming of diplomatic relations between France and Soviet Russia.² During his first visit, he remarked that "the new Russia is about to give a lesson to the entire world and particularly to Europe."³ During his second trip, in 1933, when Stalin's state-planned famine designed to punish a trou-

¹ Martin Malia, *History's Locomotives. Revolutions and the Making of the Modern World*, edited by and with a foreword by Terence Emmons (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 254.

² For an extensive description of this case, see Angelo Mitchievici, *Umbrele Paradisului. Scriitori români și francezi în Uniunea sovietică* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011).

³ Édouard Herriot, *La Russie nouvelle* (Paris: J. Ferenczi et Fils: Éditeurs, 1922), 40.

blesome Ukraine was well under way—a strategy that caused the death of millions as well as cannibalistic acts—Herriot witnessed an almost endemic cornucopia: “I crossed across Ukraine! Well! I am telling you that I saw her as a garden in full blossom.”⁴

Visiting the Soviet Union entailed a different kind of travel practice. It replaced the former journey paradigm which used to correspond in a *mutatis mutandis* manner to an ideal *art de voyager*. The latter type of journey was emblematically embodied by the works pertaining to the Classical as well as Romantic period. Going to the first workers’ state would take the form of a *journey for statistic purposes*, a *pilgrim’s journey*, a *delegate’s journey*, the marks of which are the direct upshot of a vast ideological project that aimed to forge and alter reality in the spirit of the Soviet utopia. Adrien Pasquali judiciously emphasized the fact that “to each and every period, journey and, subsequently, to each and every travel account, its view upon the world, [is] either localist or globalist.”⁵ Consequently, the writers⁶ traveling to the Soviet Union provide us with more than merely their experience. They give us testimonies about the birth of a new world. This world stands for a challenge in itself, precisely because it arises as an outcome of massive social engineering.

Unlike the worlds colonized by the European explorers starting in the fifteenth century, which were perceived as exotic, populated by a humankind lacking contact with the “civilized,” the Land of the Soviets was first and foremost an intellectual project. It was the ideological representation of the “engineers of souls,” professional revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky, or Bukharin, on the political canvas. Hannah Arendt talked about “totalitarian ideologies.”⁷ and Alain Besançon about “the communist project”; phenomena that are “holis-

⁴ Ibid., 214.

⁵ Adrien Pasquali, *Le Tour des Horizons. Critiques et récits de voyage*, Avant-propos de Claude Reichler (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 18.

⁶ I often use the term “writer” instead of “intellectual” for two reasons. First, the writer is an intellectual that records his travel experience, transcribing it in an equation which translates his own stylistic sensitivity and intellectual inner structure. Second, the most impactful and sought-after testimonies were those of writers as public voices entitled to set forth the pros and cons of one’s experience.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973).

tic.” They target “a radical mutation of society, culture, of the human being itself.”⁸ Subsequently, the most appropriate travel guide for the explorer of the Land of the Soviets was not a map of tourist attractions, but rather the emblematic doctrinary texts of Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and later, Stalin.

Cezar Petrescu, one of the Romanian writers who traveled to the Soviet Union after 1945, called upon the reader to give up any travel guide or treatise on economic principles. Most testimonies written by Western travelers were irretrievably tainted by blindness. The new world was open to another sort of interpretation than that based on an economic analysis or sociological study—that of a vision. Soviet Russia was as a future whose hallmarks could be decoded in the present. It was *a future in the present*, which called for a form of visionarism. The traveler experienced this promise as a socialist “prophecy” governed by the laws of history.

The Early Travelers: Tsarist versus Soviet Russia

Very few Romanians visited Russia until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Colonel Alexandru Averescu, an officer in the Royal Army,⁹ provided several accounts, including a micro-monograph dealing with the culture and civilization of a country allegedly outside the borders of European civilization, only tied to it through its intelligentsia. During World War I, Romania was Russia’s ally, in spite of considerable reservations among the local political elite. Radu Rosseti wrote a book emblematically titled “No Wise with Russia,” published in the wake of World War I, in 1914.¹⁰ In it, he advocated that such an alliance ran counter to Romania’s interests. His contentions may be summed up as follows: 1) Russia is an ally Romania cannot ever rely on; 2) Russia

⁸ Alain Besançon, *A Century of Horrors: Communism, Nazism, and the Uniqueness of the Shoah* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007).

⁹ Alexandru Averescu, *Deux mois en Russie. Impressions militaires sur les Troupes de la circonscription de Kiew*, translated to the French by Capitaine M. Margaritesco (Bucharest: Etablissement Graphique J.V.Socescu, 1903).

¹⁰ Radu Rosseti, *În nici un chip cu Rusia* (Bucharest: Tipografia și Stabilimentul de Arte Grafice George Ionescu, 1914)

never keeps to its military commitments and tends to infringe the diplomatic treaties it signs; 3) Any aid coming from Russia hides a strategy of annexation and is a mere pretext for a harsh exploitation of that country's resources. At the same time, the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were also marked by a group of Romanian intellectuals, including Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea or Garabet Ibrăileanu,¹¹ having developed a liking for French and Russian utopian socialism and populism.

After Lenin's party took power in Russia, official relations with Romania ceased as the new state refused to recognize Bessarabia's unification with the kingdom. They resumed in 1934 only for a very brief time. In June 1940, following the ultimatum given by the Soviet Union, Romania was forced to yield its northeast territories (Bessarabia, currently the Republic of Moldova, as well as North Bukovina and the Hertza Region, territories that are presently part of Ukraine). During this period, there was no contact, connection, or possibility whatsoever to cross borders into the Soviet Union. The only accounts date from the Bolshevik Revolution and were written by public official Constatin Constante and officer Voicu Nițescu. However, these were not travel accounts, but journals of a difficult retreat in a time when Russia was shaken by civil war. These reports resemble those of French refugees in Russia, such as Claude Anet, Paul Du Bochet, Ludovic Nadeau, Pierre Gilliard, the tutor of the heir of the Tsarist throne, Alexei, or novelist Serge de Chessin, who depicted the terror instituted by the revolutionaries. The official and the officer were suspicious of the central figures of the new regime, the Bolsheviks. In their view, the Revolution bore the mark of the ruthlessness they assigned more generally to Russian culture. These travels in reverse, dictated by repatriation, mirror the baffling impetus of the political regime change. They focus on the massive, bloody clash between the old Russia and the world that had just seen the light: Bolshevik Russia.

Romanian-Soviet relations were made even more difficult during the interwar period due to espionage allegations, Soviet propaganda, and the activities of the Communist Party of Romania

¹¹ Antonio Patraș, *Ibrăileanu. Către o teorie a personalității* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007).

(PCR).¹² The latter was banned in 1924 because of its involvement in the Soviet-inspired peasant revolt in Tatar-Bunar, at the border with the Ukrainian SSR, a direct challenge to Romania's territorial integrity. In parallel, there was an important group of left-wing intellectuals—members of the Social-Democrat Party: Zaharia Stancu, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Petre Constantinescu-Iași, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Belu Zilber, etc. In contrast, many Romanian interwar intellectuals adhered to the far right wing. The 1927 generation, which included Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Nae Ionescu, or Mircea Vulcănescu, showed a propensity for the legionary movement led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. The ideology of these young intellectuals did not necessarily involve contempt towards other totalitarian regimes. In his *Transfiguration de la Roumanie*, Emil Cioran was thrilled by the radical solutions and values promoted in the Soviet Union. What brought together young people who were partisans of either the far-left or the far-right was the profound distrust of liberal democracy as well as the inclination towards political messianism.¹³

Even after diplomatic relations resumed in 1934, making a trip to the Soviet Union remained a challenge. Romanian authorities took a hard line to prevent local fellow-travelers from undertaking such visits. There were however two examples of journeys made by two communist sympathizers. Interestingly their insights diverge. One of these accounts belongs to the writer Alexandru Sahia, and it was published under the title of *The USSR Today* (1935).¹⁴ The work enjoyed a certain popularity and then fell into obscurity until 1945, when the new political context provided the terrain for its resurgence as a key element in pro-Soviet propaganda. Alexandru Sahia achieved a cross-breed between a monograph, the prototype well established before the dawn of the Soviet Union, and lived experience—recounting events of pedagogical value, storytelling with didactic quality. There was tension

¹² On the interwar history of the Romanian Communist Party, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹³ See Vladimir Tismaneanu's chapter in the present volume.

¹⁴ Alexandru Sahia, *U.R.S.S. azi* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei "Ion Creangă", 1935).

between the two approaches, which was rooted in the overlap between two means of propaganda. On the one hand, one encounters in the volume the scientific structuring of statistic data impossible for the reader to fact-check. Its function was to prove the superiority of the Soviet economy. On the other hand, the author invoked the emotional effect of living under the aegis of a new, ideologically refined human-kind.¹⁵ Alexandru Sahia's book represented a model of *statistic journey*, where figures and indicators of the five-year plan prove the superiority of new world. The same year, British economists Sidney and Beatrice Webb famously employed the same devices in their *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*.¹⁶

The second book was a genuine *succès du scandale*, especially since its author was, in contrast to Sahia, a prominent figure of the international left, a popular European writer famous for his militancy and pro-Soviet stance. However, his travel account was completely different from the information disseminated by the Soviet propaganda. It was a radical departure from the image promoted by "political pilgrims" or other fellow-travelers. Unsurprisingly it caused a stir. The author in question was Panait Istrati.

The Pilgrim: Between Faith and Apostasy

Who was Panait Istrati? With the support of prestigious French intellectuals such as Romain Rolland, the Romanian writer became a renowned novelist, even getting the nickname "Balkan Gorky." His stature grew among the international left when he developed an elective affinity to Christian Rakovsky.¹⁷ The latter was his ideologi-

¹⁵ After August 23rd, 1944 there was a tendency to envelop the book and its publication in a legendary aura (e.g., the difficulties encountered by the author when confronting Romanian customs authorities problems with Romanian officials upon returning from the USSR).

¹⁶ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (London: Longmans Green and Co. London, 1935).

¹⁷ Christian Rakovsky was a prominent figure of Bolshevik Russia, a close friend of Leo Trotsky. He was executed on Stalin's order on September 11, 1941. He was an important activist of the Romanian social-democrat movement (1905–1917), a movement established and led by Constantin

cal mentor. Istrati was also friends with other prominent figures of the Bolshevik Revolution, such as Boris Souvarine, who later would become a harsh critic of Stalinism. Rakovsky's expulsion from France coincided with Panait Istrati's trip to Soviet Russia. He therefore witnessed Rakovsky's fall in the Bolshevik hierarchy, as he attracted Stalin's ire for his support of Trotsky during the power struggle in Kremlin in the second half of the 1920s. Going back to Soviet Russia was a double defeat for Rakovsky. The ex-foreign minister was demoted to Astrahan where Istrati met him again. Istrati was accompanied by Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis.

Panait Istrati is an epitome of romantic socialism and of the figure of the revolutionary whom he extolled in his writing. His relationship with Rakovsky was paradigmatic for Istrati's ideological profile. Rakovsky criticized Istrati for being too soft. Istrati was a revolutionary *by vocation*, as opposed to *by profession*, best represented by the archetype of Rakhmetov, the hero in Chernyshevsky's famous novel *What Is to Be Done?* This preliminary demarcation based on revolutionary priorities was praised by some anti-Stalinists too, such as Victor Serge, former anarchist converted to Bolshevism, or Boris Souvarine, French activist of the Komintern. The books they wrote—*Soviets 1929* and *La Russie nue*—were published under the name of Panait Istrati, for their authors' safety. The Romanian writer agreed to act as the face of the Trotskyist militants because of his support for their revolutionary approach.

Istrati rejected affiliation based on theory. He preferred what he considered genuine adherence grounded on the soul: "they who turn to insurrection through theory, turn from it through theory."¹⁸ However, he admitted that the revolutionary by profession had a fundamental quality: his hatred consistently perpetuated through discourse, which generated the prototype of the propagandist or instiga-

Dobrogeanu-Gherea. Rakovsky played a significant role on the European diplomatic stage. He was Foreign Minister of Ukraine and contributed to the ratification of the agreement with Germany at Rapallo in 1922. The treaty allowed Russia to exit the isolation imposed on it by the European states.

¹⁸ Panait Istrati, *Spovedanie pentru învinși*, trans. Alexandru Talex (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1991), 31.

tor as a professional. Historian Édouard Raydon represented Istrati as a “revolted spirit,” whom he contrasted to the revolutionary by profession. The former does not incorporate the dialectic capabilities that allowed for final degree paradoxes—the element turning the militant into a fierce enemy acting along the party’s line at a specific moment.¹⁹ In his novel *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler performed a minute dissection of this “dialectic” practiced by the new *apartchiki*.

Istrati’s encounters with Rakovsky played a key role in his reconversion. The “diplomatic” dialogue between the “mentor” and his “disciple” on Bolshevism, before Istrati’s visit to Soviet Russia, was published under the title of *A Hasty Departure*. It is crucial to underline the emphasis placed by the two on the multifarious meanings delivered by the word “to see.” Underneath this initiatic “vision” one can unfold in advance the experience that loomed large for Istrati. “To see” actually involved the visionarism later invoked by post-1945 Romanian writers visiting the Soviet Union: a willful arrest of any critical stance about the present course of events in favor of an unconditional trust in the grandiosity of the future-oriented Soviet project—ultimately, an act of faith.

Unlike Sahia, Panait Istrati enjoyed a solid financial situation obtained from the translation of his books in the Soviet Union and even from the screen adaptation of his novel *Kira Kiralina* by the VUFKU (All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration) studios. His reliability was an important asset for the USSR. Istrati was one of the most energetic advocates of the Soviet Union in the Western world, enjoying substantial media exposure.²⁰ He was invited to Moscow as vicepresident of A.U.S. (*Les Amis de l’Union Soviétique*). In this context, Istrati was able to visit multiple Soviet regions, most of which were out of reach for

¹⁹ “Dialectics never was Panait’s strength. He excessively and ceaselessly repeated that he could never accept sectarianism, class hatred, or orders.” Édouard Raydon, *Panait Istrati, vagabond de génie* (Paris: Les Éditions Municipales, 1968), 121.

²⁰ Istrati experiences an exceptional ascension in spite of his difficult literary debut. In 1927, when he left for the USSR, he was member of the P.E.N. (Poets-Essayists-Novelists) club, vice president of A.U.S., member of the “Committee for Defending the Victims of White Terror of Balkans,” which had held conferences in Germany and Austria. He also participated in the reunions held at “Wagram” and the “Salle des Sociétés Savantes.”

the common tourist, irrespective of his/her prestige. He was probably the foreign writer for whom the Soviet Union opened its doors at their widest. This is why his “treason” would be even more grievous.

On October 15, 1927, Istrati left for the USSR to participate at the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The writer experienced an organic revulsion towards the festivities (the parade, the speeches, the exhibitions, the symposiums, etc). The pageant of voluntariness, to paraphrase Mikhail Bakhtin, of the earlier revolutionary years had been completely replaced by another kind of display—a controlled, disciplined one, in which gigantic-scale parades played a central part. It was a show that reflected the institutionalization of revolutionary culture.²¹ The writer then traveled to the Caucasus, passing through Ukraine and Georgia on his way to the Black Sea. Upon return to Moscow, he met Nikos Kazantzakis. Together they left for Odessa where, out of a strong revolutionary fervor, they embarked for Greece in order to spread the Bolshevik gospel. They landed in Piraeus on December 31. At the time Greece was marked by scandals leading even to the dismissal of a local minister, which triggered Istrati’s expulsion from the country. Obviously, such an outcome increased his revolutionary aura. He returned to Russia in March 1928.

There are two stages of Istrati’s journey across the USSR: one of gathering momentum marked by emphatic articles; and one of rude awakening defined by the Rusakov affair, roughly consisting in pressure strategies exerted on Trotskyist sympathizers—the prologue to the Great Purge, which started in 1934, after Kirov’s assassination. Rusakov was a modest worker, but also Victor Serge’s father-in-law, a prominent revolutionary figure affiliated to Trotskyist circles. After Greece, Istrati discovered in the USSR a bothersome, unsightly reality, as if he had adjusted his lens. Once this shift in perspective happened, his trip turned into an account about the downfall of the Soviet’s Union triumphal image.

What was the cause for such radical change in the pilgrim-writer’s story? Istrati stated that while he was in Greece, many things had

²¹ See Alexander Zakharov’s essay “Mass Celebrations in a Totalitarian System” in *Tekstura. Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, ed. and trans. by Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich, with a foreword by Stephen Bann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 216.

changed in Soviet Russia and that the regime became suspicious of him. Was this true? In his monograph on Istrati, Boris Souvarine contended the exact opposite: Istrati was closely assisted by Soviet “guests” following a long-established pattern set up by Intourist (the Soviet tourist agency) for any foreigner traveling to the USSR. Maybe the consistency of his enthusiastic displays—what Jeffrey Brooks refers to as “the ethos of self-denial,”²² so typical for the 1920s—created a level of self-assurance on the Soviet part that decreased local officials’ vigilance in screening the realities they revealed to Istrati. To quote Souvarine: “Never before had a visitor I met covered such an extensive itinerary, seen so many people and things, asked so many questions. However, he did not travel on his own. Zealous members of the party in power, mischievous interpreters, ‘guardian angels’ and snitches of all kinds would always monitor him.”²³ Istrati had only written fervent, enthusiastic accounts about the USSR in line with the existent propaganda. Consequently, the regime’s attitude towards Istrati could not have changed. On the contrary, the regime seems to have increased its attentions to the Romanian writer. It was not their attitude towards Istrati that transformed, but Istrati himself. Monique Jutrin-Klener contended that the writer experienced during the Greek episode a conscience-awakening moment.²⁴ Istrati’s disenchantment coincided with the Rusakov affair. It is obvious that the process had started earlier but gathered momentum during those months.²⁵ Istrati learned to “see” with the help of his Trotskyist friends.

²² Also note the balance between this “ethos of self-denial” characteristic of 1920s as well as that of “economy of the gift” pertaining to the 1930s, with Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 83.

²³ Boris Souvarine, “Panaït Istrati et le communisme,” *Le Débat* no. 9 (1981–82): 116–33, quoted by. Monica Lovinescu, *Etica neuitării*, an anthology edited and foreworded by Vladimir Tismăneanu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 213.

²⁴ Monique Jutrin-Klener, *Panaït Istrati un chardon déraciné* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970), 81–82.

²⁵ We can also take as a reference point the two letters Istrati sends to comrade Gherson, secretary of the G.P.U. (the future KGB), dated Novâi Afon (Abkhazia), December 4, 1928 and Hotel Passage (Moscow), December 18th, 1928. Panaït Istrati returned to Paris on February 15th, 1929.

The case of Istrati reveals the difference between two generic features of the journey across the USSR. The first aspect is characteristic for the fervent revolutionary-writer, a political pilgrim endowed with a “convenient” blindness guiding him only to those things catered by the Soviet tourist services for the privileged foreigner. The second is the testimony of the rational explorer having pierced deep into the heart of Soviet Russia. He acquired the ability to perceive the undertones of the reality he witnessed and the habit of fact-checking based on unofficial sources. The discovered paradoxes fueled his agonizing disenchantment.

Istrati exploited the Rusakov affair as a case study, but also as a matter of faith. It represented the manufactured truths of Stalinism and, at a less noticeable level, a symptom of his dormant antisemitism. Istrati published *The Rusakov Affair* as an article distinct from his travel book. Only later does he append it as a final chapter. For Istrati, this affair was the trigger for his criticism of the Soviet Union as well as the door closing behind him and wiping out the last of his great utopian expectations.

The completion of this journey, covered in *Vers l'autre Flamme, après seize mois dans L'U.R.S.S. Confessions pour vaincus* (1929), marked a milestone for Istrati, but also a rude awakening. It was paradigmatic for other left-wing intellectuals who refused to renounce their critical sense upon encountering the Soviet Union. This book shows that the journey was a personal drama for Istrati. He relinquished a great illusion, which triggered two smear campaigns against him: in 1929–1930 and 1935, that had ripple effects in Romania. The main instigator of these campaigns was writer Henri Barbusse, who, in 1926, was the literary director of the communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*. Istrati did not expect that Romain Rolland, his mentor, would forsake him. He did not anticipate the extent and ingenuity of the attacks coordinated across the West by the Soviet authorities. However, he was fully aware of the potential scandal that the publication of his travel account would generate. As opposed to his unconditional, idealistic loyalty, the harsh criticism of his experience in “the Land of Soviets” signaled an irreversible fracture, despite the precautions taken by the author in his foreword, to cushion the blow.

Istrati and Kazantzakis had planned to write a book extensively documented with photographs entitled *Vers l'étoile rouge* (Towards

the Red Star).²⁶ The experience brought on by his journey across the Soviet Union pushed Istrati to write *Vers l'autre flamme* (Towards another flame), which was an apostasy. Despite his ideological disenchantment with the USSR, Istrati's revolutionary fervor remained alight. Soviet authorities misjudged him. He was a genuine, honest revolutionary, who was useful for the new regime as a "fellow traveler." The same features though proved to be dangerous for Moscow's image abroad. His continued belief in left-wing ideals made him far more threatening and credible than enemies of other political colors.

Pilgrimage and *Hacilik*: West and East

In his book, *Political Pilgrims*²⁷ dealing with American and British intellectuals' fascination with dictatorships, Paul Hollander made a clear-cut distinction between political pilgrims and fellow travelers. According to him, "both share a critical stance toward Western societies and sympathy toward 'socialism.' . . . However, 'fellow-traveler' had a more limited meaning: it referred to Soviet and Communist sympathizers of the 1930s and 1940s who made no formal commitment and remained outside the Communist party for various reasons. Their services were eagerly sought after by the party and the Soviet Union, since their symbolic neutrality seemed to enhance their credibility and propaganda value. . . . Essentially, the view of the fellow-travelers represented slight modifications or variations of the official line, or its softened version."²⁸ According to Paul Hollander, although not straightforwardly committed from a political point of view, the fellow-travelers keep to the party's line, securing them the alibi of neutrality. The main distinction delineation between them and the political pilgrims consists

²⁶ See Jutrin-Klener, *Panaït Istrati, un chardon déraciné*, 84.

²⁷ The term "political pilgrims" was coined in the Anglo-American literature to refer to travels to the Soviet Union, the coinage "political tourists" is also used by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen, the editors of an anthology of studies dealing with the travels undertaken by Australian intellectuals to the Soviet Union: *Political tourists. Travelers from Australia to Soviet Union in the 1920s–1940s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

²⁸ Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (4th ed.) (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 27.

of a deeper involvement of the latter in communist politics via party membership. Nevertheless, fellow-travelers provisionally served the interests of the Communist Party. Be they agents of influence, establishment leaders, cultural and/or political figures, they often secured a democratic semblance for the Soviet Union. Once they become useless for the regime, they are purged or marginalized. Professional revolutionaries are not to be mistaken for these fellow-travelers, who were not members of the inner party circles. And yet, they (paradoxically) served the cause better than the regular apparatchik. They were the “best friends” of the USSR, disseminating travel accounts conforming to what Moscow officials wished to disclose to the world.

The explanation that Paul Hollander advanced for Western intellectuals’ attraction to communist regimes deals with two aspects: social justice and the quest for wholeness, “the sense of identity and community, meaning and purpose in life.”²⁹ This search for a purpose meant to compensate for the contradictions and inconsistencies of dynamic European societies, especially in the context of the Great Depression. They were sources of meaning and sense in the larger context of the disenchantment with democracy. They produced utopian configurations that converged with the Soviet experiment. The Soviet Union offered the promise of institutionalizing social utopia. It furnished the raw material for the reveries and fantasies haunting Western intellectuals. It represented the promise for a cure-all society where egotism, frustrations, or inconsistencies vanished. The utopian project called Stalinism was only illusorily equal to rationalism. In fact, it maintained an abstruse relationship with myth, adopting near religious overtones. Michail Epstein coined the term of *mythocracy* to describe this phenomenon, while Grigory Tulchinsky defined it as a mixture of materialism, nationalism, and utopianism.³⁰ American

²⁹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 28.

³⁰ “These components of Stalinism mutually reinforce each other: materialism creates a pseudofoundation for rationalistic schemata, which in turn give a pseudoscientific character to essentially volunteerist premises. Utopianism allows these rationalistic constructs to be accepted with religious confidence, while endowing utterly stillborn ideas with an illusory feasibility. Materialism justifies utopianism by establishing inevitable, objective laws, admitting of no alternatives. Utopianism in turn stimulates materialism by outspringing it, by promoting what we want as what already is and vice ver-

anarchists Emma Goldman and Aleksander Berkman were initially thrilled, then disappointed by the Soviet experiment and subsequently rejected by Bolsheviks. The Moscow correspondent of the *New York Times*, Walter Duranty found comfort in the Soviet lie, while British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge was expelled from the USSR for informing the West about the Great Ukrainian famine.

The quest undertaken by Western political pilgrims and fellow-travelers to Soviet Russia fundamentally differed from the one undertaken after 1945 by those coming from Eastern Europe, from countries that were in the Soviet sphere in the aftermath of Yalta. To denote this latter type of journey, I have chosen the term *hacilik*. The word *hacilik* (from Turkish) designates in the Balkans the ritual journey undertaken by a good Christian or Muslim to their holy lands. The traveler would receive the name of “*hadji*,” which bestowed on them within their community an upper degree of worthiness. The *hacilik*-journey granted social recognition and spiritual value. It was an inner quest as much as a physical displacement. The term *hacilik* refers to a lodging intended for erotic encounters—a brothel. This connotation does not lack symbolism in the case of *hacilik* journeys, since Romanian intellectuals were forced to make a display of their love and friendship towards the Soviet Union. The propaganda disseminated by the writer in favor of the Soviet Union made him a political instrument. The phenomenon was not only grounded on immediate material gratification, but rather on the perspective of a better social status. In the case of Romanian writers, especially those intellectuals committed to preserving their standing in post-1945 society, to gaining access to high positions, or to propagate through a polemical biographical study a series of ideological tenets, traveling to Soviet Russia became an imperative after August 23, 1944 (the date when Romania turned against Nazi Germany).

Postwar East European intellectuals marked their encounter with the Soviet Union through a public account. As a custom, intellectuals were supposed to produce at least a newspaper article about their

sa. We can, in fact, designate Stalinism as the unity of materialism, rationalism, and utopianism in the embodiment of their exact opposites.” Grigory Tulchinsky, “Culture and Mythocracy,” in *Re-entering the Sign. Articulating New Russian Culture*, ed. by Ellen E. Berry and Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 63.

experience. In the USSR, Romanian writers shared their travel impressions through conferences, radio broadcasts, articles, and books. Such testimonies were a form of agreement between the two sides, the Soviet and the Romanian. Another fundamental characteristic of the *hacilik* journey, as opposed to that undertaken by Western intellectuals at their own free will, is that East Europeans could only write in glowing terms about the situation they found in the Soviet Union. Their endorsements could not include even the slightest nuance or disapproval towards the USSR irrespective of the chosen subject matter. From this point of view, travel accounts produced by Romanian travelers after 1945 were acclamatory, as Soviet reality was met without any reserve.

Another unwritten law for these Romanian travelers was to include in their account a *mea culpa* through which they admitted Romania's sin of having attacked the Soviet Union during World War II. The subject of the occupation of Bessarabia and North Bucovina by the Soviets in 1940 was taboo. In addition, they were bound to declare the Soviet Union as superior in all fields of development, which involved regarding each visited site as paradigmatic. The *hacilik* involved an act of faith as well as freezing any form of distrust or suspicion. Moreover, these intellectuals were not even forced to lie, since excursions were organized for large groups with clearly demarcated routes, so that none of them could have an unmediated glimpse of the real conditions. They were under the close supervision of an Intourist official.

The *hacilik* journey was a solid instrument for social ascent: a confirmation of the author's ideological commitment and availability for serving the purposes of the pro-Soviet regime newly created in Bucharest. This meant obtaining access to public offices or allowing for the preservation of pre-existing status. The phenomenon survived until the mid-1960s, when the Romanian Communist Party adopted a maverick position within the socialist bloc. Autonomy from the Soviet hegemon was emphasized, while Stalinist policies remained in place. Any possibility of relaxation in the sense of a democratic turn in the system was rejected. From this moment on, trips to the Soviet Union ceased to function as a means for political validation.

After 1945, the *exploration journey* practiced during interwar period morphed into a *delegation trip*. The latter was no longer exciting or unpredictable, although it maintained an element of surprise.

Travelers did not extol a genuine viatic impulse inherent to pioneers discovering a *terra incognita*. The intensity of crossing into and experiencing the Soviet Union was significantly diminished. The delegation trip perfectly fit into the Soviet mould: impeccable economy and infrastructure, the leveling of any incongruity or accident, a faultless order dominating any course of action. Trips were organized for large groups, and their didactic purpose was obvious. The delegation trip mainly consisted in acquiring useful contacts, establishing bilateral rapports and common agendas, and setting up countervisits. Each of these trips was followed by a similar one, made by Soviet delegations of scholars, writers, etc, to Romania. These exchanges were organized by ARLUS (Romanian Association for Strengthening Relations with the Soviet Union), which set up a series of cultural and scientific events meant to legitimize among the population the USSR's political agenda.³¹

The controlled Soviet tourism made available a “troika” of the three largest cities: Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. One would not gain access to deep incursions into Soviet territory; genuine exploration was out of the question. Thus, the Land of Soviets was experienced along the dictated “tourist” route. There were several types of delegations: political, scientific, academic, clerical, or those made up of workers.

It was not a coincidence that the period defined by the most intensive viatic activity was the period of transition to the people's democracy, between 1945 and 1947. This was the timeframe when stakes were at their highest, as Romanian communists struggled to break through and take over the state. The proclamation of the people's democracy in 1947 signaled another surge in journeys to the USSR. These travels were part and parcel of the consolidation of the ideological framework in the context of Romania's Sovietization. The most important delegations remained those comprised of writers, the most efficient instruments of propaganda. Nevertheless, the tradition of workers' delegations continued after Stalin's death in 1953 and even after Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's passing in 1965. The trips to the USSR included all social classes, experiencing a crash course in a new branch of science: Soviet communism.

³¹ For more details on ARLUS, see Bogdan C. Iacob's chapter in this volume.

One of the most important delegation trips to the USSR took place between November 2 and 19, 1946, and was the ultimate symbol of Romanian intellectuals' engagement with the Soviet Union during the transition period. A delegation made up of writers and journalists accepted the invitation to launch the *VOKS* (Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) and *Trud*, the Soviet Workers' Trade Union newspaper.³² The group comprised of the procommunist social-democrat Ion Pas, head of the National Theatre Company and President of the Professional Journalists' Trade Union, illegalist (member of the communist party during the time when it was banned by the Romanian authorities) George Macovescu, Secretary General of the Information Ministry, writer Cezar Petrescu, antifascist journalist Tudor Teodorescu Braniște, editor-in-chief of the *Dimineața*, Grigore Graur, editor of *Adevărul*, M. Sevastos, member of the editorial committee of *Universul*, Sebastian Șerbescu, director of *Semnalul*, the literary historian George Călinescu, also director of *Națiunea*, avant-garde poet Gheorghe Dinu (Stephan Roll), editor in chief of *Timpul*, the poet Miron Radu Paraschivescu and Pavel Chirtoacă, editors at *Scânteia*, Andrei Tudor, editor at *România liberă*, Vasile Bârcă, editor in chief of *Frontul plugarilor* (the newspaper of the homonymous party, which was led by Petru Groza, the prime minister of the first communist-controlled government).

The intellectuals who were members of the delegation fulfilled a double role. They were writers and journalists, the latter position augmenting their propagandistic potential. This trip enjoyed unprecedented media coverage. ARLUS organized a series of press conferences, interviews, meetings with the readers, debates, council boards, radio broadcasters, etc., not to mention the abundant travel accounts published in the newspapers.

George Călinescu, Cezar Petrescu, Andrei Tudor, and Ion Pas each distilled the core of their experiences during the ten days in the USSR in books, initially published as a series of newspaper articles, in view of the imperative for immediate and compelling "testimony." Călinescu published the volume "Kiev, Moscow, Leningrad"

³² The visit was set up on two levels, as the visitors pertain to two different classes—the intelligentsia and the working class. It mirrored the Soviet unity between the intelligentsia and the proletariat.

in 1949.³³ Ion Pas was more prompt, publishing “We in USSR: Kiev, Moscow, Leningrad” in 1947.³⁴ He is followed by Andrei Tudor with “Moscow: A Reportage from the Metropolis of the New World.”³⁵ Cezar Petrescu was the last to write a volume, in 1958—“Notes of a Traveler”—offering a broader review of the Soviet Union, including two other trips in 1956 and 1957.³⁶

Viatic experiences were intensively exploited. The syntagma previously coined by French writers, starting with Henri Béraud, “What I have seen...,” was now an official heading for the positive account of all Romanian writers after their “working visit” (*vizită de lucru*) to the USSR. In itself, the composition of the delegation foreshadowed the building of a cultural-administrative structure that could aid the creation of the new regime. They signaled, at a cultural and academic level, a strategy that Kenneth Jowitt called “the policy of breaking through.”³⁷ The rhetoric based on the solidarity and common traditions between Bucharest and Moscow was disseminated with the help of these prominent personalities.

The *hacilik* type of experience disqualified the idea of bookish, mediated access to the traveler’s written account. It indicated instead the lived experience of an initiatic journey, directly perceived by the reader,³⁸ since it disclosed a world of too great dimensions to be covered by the means and conventions of normal travelogues. One may find here in brief an interesting inversion of viatic conventions. Although we are looking at a journey in a real space, Soviet reality was presented as Utopia turned reality. The tendency to objectify to the fullest, pertaining to the feature report, a very popular genre in

³³ George Călinescu, *Kiev, Moscova, Leningrad* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1949).

³⁴ Ion Pas, *Noi în URSS: Kiev, Moscova, Leningrad* (Bucharest: Socec, 1947)

³⁵ Andrei Tudor, *Moscova: Reportaj despre metropola lumii noi* (Bucharest: Casa Școalelor, 1947)

³⁶ Cezar Petrescu, *Însemnări de călător. Reflecții de scriitor* (Bucharest: Cartea rusă, 1958)

³⁷ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania, 1944–1965* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

³⁸ The discovery of and knowledge about the Constitution of the Soviet Union from 1936 functioned as an ideological journey in itself because the document had been rhetorically framed as the holy text of the new Soviet civilization.

the 1950s in Romania, was complemented by the experience of the miraculous and by the rhetoric of transfiguration found in religious revelations.

The encomiastic narratives of the *hacilik* journeys were built on an original sin. The ritual of encountering the Soviet space required a *mea culpa* with a view to Romania's past faults and aggression as well as a critical stance towards the travel reports produced by Western travelers. This process presupposed an ideological polemic accompanied by religious undertones. Exculpation automatically engendered illumination and authenticity. Just as for Western pilgrims of the 1920s and 1930s, but in a deeper ideological sense, for post-1945 Romanian writers, the journey was a demonstration as much as an assurance, a proof of loyalty. It involved an atonement doubled by commitment. The exhortative discourse turned into praise in order to make up for the lost time and to oust the traces of compunction—the disbelief built by years of war and interwar anti-Soviet campaigns. In a roundabout way, this *mea culpa* toward the USSR eliminated any critical stance. No Romanian writer who visited the USSR after 1945 managed to find a balance and keep the distance required by any pretense of minimum objectivity. The terms governing the relationship with the USSR dictated the display of excessive effusion, denoting the author's unwavering adherence along the lines of religious conversion.

The Betrayal of the Scholars

With all its idiosyncrasies, the *hacilik* journey was a significant instance of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the political power. Its characteristics were relevant for the general attitude of intellectuals toward communism as ideology in general. Leszek Kołakowski judiciously asked a key question for understanding the relationship between Western intellectuals and the Soviet regime. In the third volume of his *Main Currents of Marxism (The Breakdown)*, the Polish philosopher wondered: "Why, in particular, did so many Western intellectuals, on whom there was no personal pressure, fall for Stalinism at this period and meekly swallow, or actively applaud, the Moscow chamber of horrors and the official explanation of it, whereas the lies and cruelty of the performance should have been obvious to

everyone?”³⁹ We have already seen to what extent a journey to the Soviet Union would acquire testimonial value as well as a political weight in terms of regimentation or rejection. Kołakowski referred to Lion Feuchtwanger, Romain Rolland, and Henri Barbusse. Plenty others may be nominated here, such as Louis Aragon, Pablo Neruda, Paul Éluard, Jean Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, etc.—writers who wagered their prestige in defense of Stalinism. In contrast, André Gide was an example of a writer of high acumen, who did not fall into the Kremlin’s propagandistic trap. Indeed, as Vladimir Tismăneanu noted, “too few were those like Arthur Koestler and Albert Camus who openly engaged in a struggle with the Stalinist ideology and the system it was serving.”⁴⁰ Of uttermost importance was the fact that, during the years of the Nazi menace, Soviet Russia was regarded as the sole hope for the rescue of the Western civilization, a bulwark against fascist ruthlessness. The USSR was also very skillful in concealing its totalitarian intentions and its repressive methods, which served cause of what historian Viktor Zaslavsky coined as “class cleansing.”⁴¹

Beyond these mitigating circumstances, another justification for Western writers’ blindness was the fact that some of them “sold” their conscience. Not only were these writers publicized and paid hefty amounts, but their books were published in impressive print runs. These elements of the interaction between foreign writers with the USSR also apply for the case of Romanian ones who accepted to collaborate with the communist regime in its first decade (1945–1955). I believe that Leszek Kołakowski’s assessment of the general situation is valid for both the postwar and interwar periods: “The reaction of Western intellectuals was a remarkable triumph of doctrinaire ideology over common sense and the critical instinct.”⁴² The analysis of this (self-)induced blindness is most eloquently pictured and mirrored by

³⁹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. III (*The Breakdown*), translated from the Polish by P.S. Falla (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 83–84.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe. The Poverty of Utopia* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988), 21.

⁴¹ Viktor Zaslavsky, *Class Cleansing: The Massacre of Katyn* (Cantor NY: Telos Publishing Press, 2008).

⁴² Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 78.

travel accounts. It deserves a close look since it is from this that the Marxist reappraisals that characterized the 1960s and the 1970s, the subsequent “apostasies” from totalitarian temptations, were derived. The main purpose of travelling to the USSR was precisely to camouflage the horrors and atrocities going on under the guise of Soviet revolutionary humanism.

In *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Raymond Aron discussed the function of the myth of the revolution among French intellectuals. This myth benefited from the prestige bestowed by esthetic modernism upon it, which gave the revolution a purported ability to solve both a spiritual and ideological equation, while simultaneously rejecting the perceived hypocrisy of bourgeois mentality.⁴³ In this context, the artist became associated with the “party of all revolutions” and with (far-)left radicalism. The vast majority of the surrealists were politically committed to the Soviet Union, André Breton and Louis Aragon being only the most prominent. There were the Sartrian existentialists, writers focusing on human condition with Malraux as epitome of their revolt. Last but not least, there were the Romanian left-wing intellectuals. Passion, delusion, enthusiasm, disengagement of the arts from bourgeois standards have to be combined with opportunism and identifying the potential benefits of embracing the Soviet lie. This was the case with Walter Duranty or Henri Barbusse, “an utter whore at the service of the Soviet power,” as Souvarine called him.⁴⁴

Among the writers traveling to the Soviet Union there were undeniably some who were bamboozled or genuinely naïve, or who had weak points ruthlessly exploited by their Bolshevik handlers. Even a rational spirit such as André Gide persisted in maintaining, despite his doubts, a genuine faith in the rhetoric of transfiguration. How about Romanian writers who had a genuine propensity for the left and who develop great revolutionary expectations and fervor even before Romania became a full-fledged communist regime? Such cases in the interwar period did exist, but most of these intellectuals were quite moderate, in the line of social democracy. There were a few noteworthy exceptions,

⁴³ Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

⁴⁴ Souvarine, “Panaït Istrati et le communisme,” 116–33.

such as Panait Istrati and Alexandru Sahia. Only the former enjoyed international renown and was able to make himself heard.

How about the embarrassing encomiums by Romanian writers who traveled to the Soviet Union after 1945? Philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu advanced an interesting conjecture on the caricature effect caused by such (self-)induced blindness: "Unlike the Russian case, where intellectuals had betrayed their scholarly status investing their entire life in forging the political creed called 'communism,' Romanian intellectuals only got the chance to make a petty, mingy betrayal, utterly lacking glory."⁴⁵ Liiceanu emphasized the double scope of this latter act, for such people showed contempt for their "traditional scholarly status" as well for the "political creed" they appeared to extol. In contrast to their Soviet counterparts, their betrayal was meek for "they did not experience any genuine creed that would subsequently spread."⁴⁶ Those who acquiesced in becoming campaigners for the Soviet occupier, thus avoiding imprisonment or banishment from the public scene and benefiting from the privileges presupposed by this new social contract to which they were bound, were forced to fake political fervor. Their travel accounts implicitly fueled class hatred, the corollary of their eulogy to the Soviet Union.

Writers traveling to the Soviet Union in order to preach Marxist precepts or praise a totalitarian regime were not by default ideologues. However, they surely became some sort of ideological surrogate, chimeric heralds of the new world order. They gave the regime the benefit of credibility, an asset that the new order was in dire need of in most of Eastern Europe after 1945. Their role was far from secondary. It was of paramount importance for the reorientation of the faithful followers, for winning their trust as well as for abating the strong resistance of a distrustful, often anti-Soviet population such as the Romanian one before 1944. The ultimate proof of faith consisted in the public manifestation of the attachment to the new order and the disavowal of national values, which were replaced by CPSU and Cominform-guided internationalism. The visits to the USSR were one of the tests for such conversion of former wavering intellectuals.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Despre ură* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 117.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 118.

Monica Lovinescu, one of the most iconic broadcasters of the Romanian section at Radio Free Europe, once emphasized the near absence of revolt or opposition against the regime among writers for most of the communist rule in the country. In contrast with Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, or the GDR, Romanians were the “gaping hole in the middle of the Eastern dissent.” Monica Lovinescu added that the condition of Romanian writers was marked by the “perpetual fever of non-involvement”⁴⁷

In his dialogue with philosopher Mihai Șora, a former communist intellectual who experienced apostasy but remained on the left, Vladimir Tismăneanu noted the absence of any sign of mutiny among Romanian writers in the context of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Șora’s explanation of this situation pointed to the frailty of the interwar left, which could not become the foundation for a strong socialist tradition in the postwar period. The latter could have fuelled stronger contestation among local writers, more impactful challenges against the regime’s dogmas.⁴⁸ Such explanation does not condone Romanian writers’ propensity for inaction or their ignominious rituals of critical autodafé such as those comprised in their travel accounts to the Soviet Union. It is not surprising that these literary outputs were played down or overlooked in the biographies of most of these intellectuals during the ideological cycle of national communism when Nicolae Ceaușescu was in power.

As mentioned earlier, we must not forget that the support for the Soviet Union from personalities who had experienced the ravages of the far right in interwar and World War II Romania, such as endocrinologist Constantin I. Parhon, philosopher Tudor Bugnariu, historian Scarlat Callimachi, or lawyer Ion Gheorghe Maurer, was a response to the specter of fascism. The sense of solidarity that was at the basis of this pro-Sovietism transferred itself into the post-1945 years.⁴⁹ A spe-

⁴⁷ Monica Lovinescu, “Puterea și scriitorii” in Lovinescu, *Etica neuitării*, 185–88.

⁴⁸ Mihai Șora’s interview is in Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măștile răului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 145–46.

⁴⁹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 58–59.

cial case would be that of Jewish intellectuals, for whom the threat was existential in the context of the genocidal, racist, and antisemitic discourse and policies advanced by the Third Reich, the Iron Guard, and post-1938 governments in Romania. All things considered, it is undeniable that after 1945, for personal, ideological, biographical, etc. reasons, many Romanian writers indulged in what Czesław Miłosz defined as the condition of “ketman.”⁵⁰ They excelled in developing a cunning balancing act between official and unofficial spaces. They propagated ideologically correct ideas, while camouflaging their unofficial options as much as possible. Czesław Miłosz wonderfully described this strategy of the defeated, of the subdued, that is, the various practices of ideological regimentation.

The concept of esthetic ketman can be easily applied to the experience of Romanian writers during communism. The writer was allowed to preserve his little bourgeois, intimate world as long as he collaborated with the regime. Just as in the case of the professional ketman, the tribute paid to political power (encomiums, poetry or prose, targeted journalism, etc) granted breathing space for producing a valuable work of art. The ideological devotion expressed in the accounts of viatic experiences in the USSR of writers who were part of the Romanian literary canon (Mihail Sadoveanu, George Călinescu, Geo Bogza, Tudor Arghezi, or Cezar Petrescu) was an important propagandistic ingredient for the self-Sovietization of Romania. Fear did play a great part in some of these cases as the alternatives could be as extreme as imprisonment and death. The detailed accounts of Romanian prisons’ experiences provided by Ruxandra Cesereanu⁵¹ or dissident writer Paul Goma⁵² reveal the motivations and risks that marked the destinies of those intellectuals who refused to abandon their moral conscience.

Furthermore, in 2006, *The Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania shed light on the purge of important interwar authors from libraries

⁵⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Vintage Books, 1990).

⁵¹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Călătorie spre centrul infernului. Gulagul în conștiința românească* (Bucharest: Editura Fundația Culturală Română, 1998).

⁵² The prison of Pitești was a space of radical and extremely violent “reeducation” set into place by the communist officials. It was a uniquely horrid case within the expansive penitentiary system in communist Romania. Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitești* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990).

during the first decade of the communist regime. A party commission led by Iosif Ardeleanu and A.I. Ștefănescu published a list of banned publications. By May 1, 1948, it was already a 500-page volume listing 8,779 titles: “the impact of this apocalyptic cleansing on the state of mind of the Romanian intelligentsia was devastating.”⁵³ Some of these writers would come back on the market only after proving their loyalty towards the new regime through travel accounts depicting their visit to the Soviet Union. In other cases, such as that of Petru Dumitriu, a successful travelogue in the first workers’ state would become the spark for a fulminant career. But the ketman condition could sometimes become unmanageable: in 1960, Dumitriu fled to West Germany and his work slowly fell into oblivion.⁵⁴

The Romanian case shows that after 1945 travel accounts to the Soviet Union fulfilled three main functions. First, they disseminated ideological representations of reality that legitimized both “the first workers’ state” and the local fledgling communist regime. Second, they were an instrument for the protection and advancement of one’s status in times of radical social and economic upheaval. Third, they reflected complex historical trajectories determined by the intricacies of the period between the 1920s and the early 1960s. These were four decades when intellectuals in Romania, and more generally in Eastern Europe, faced the massive challenge of political extremisms and war and often fell short of standing tall before the totalitarian temptation. However, as the comparative instances of Western travelogues about the Soviet Union show, in these dark times, across the entire continent, the examples of maintaining one’s critical reason and democratic mindset were few and far between.

⁵³ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România. Raport final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 309. See the entire chapter “‘Ideologie și teroare. Monopolul asupra vieții culturale,” 308–31.

⁵⁴ Cristian Vasile, *Literatură și artele în România comunistă 1948–1953* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010) and by the same author *Politicile culturale în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011).

BOGDAN C. IACOB

*National Rebirth, Intellectuals, and
the Rise of the Communist Regime
in Romania (1944–1948)*

On March 9, 1945, three days after the nomination of the communist-dominated government led by Petru Groza, representatives of the Romanian Association for Tightening Relations with the Soviet Union (ARLUS) met with Andrey Vishinsky, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs and the person nominated by Stalin to handle the political outlook of the postwar regime in Romania.¹ The same day, just an hour prior to this meeting, another momentous event, of vital importance for post-1945 dynamics in the country, had taken place: Northern Transylvania was officially returned to Romania—a territory previously assigned to Hungary on the basis of the Second Vienna Award (1940) arbitered by Nazi Germany and Italy.

The ARLUS delegation was led by its president, C. I. Parhon, the renowned endocrinologist, president of the Academy, long term left-wing activist. He was accompanied by writer Mihail Sadoveanu, who at the time was at the peak of his fame, biologist Traian Săvulescu, along with other well-known scientists and public personalities. Parhon began the meeting with the Soviet guest by thanking “his Excellency” and the Soviet Union, “in the name of ARLUS and of the Romanian people, for the fact that our dear province, the Ardeal [i.e., Transylva-

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0335. This paper was initially presented at the annual conference of Imre Kertész Kolleg entitled “Catastrophe and Utopia: Central and Eastern European Intellectual Horizons 1933–1958” (Budapest, June 13–15, 2013).

nia], was re-attached to the Motherland.” Sadoveanu doubled down on his colleague’s gratitude: “This people of peasants [Romanians] are not guilty for the mistakes of their rulers. For one hundred years, since we have had a modern state . . . the people wished justice for its life and soul and, I believe, finally justice has come upon us. The Soviet Union brings the fulfillment of such longing.”

Vishinsky’s reply was equally courteous. He declared that in returning the Ardeal “we took into account Romanians’ feelings and we sought to offer satisfaction to their national emotions.” The Soviet official described the road ahead for the new government in Romania: “we, the Bolsheviks, are revolutionaries, even the greatest revolutionaries. But we know that nothing can be done if things are not approached gradually. . . . Communism is not an import or export merchandise. It is an issue linked to the needs of each people. In order to achieve it, one requires a favorable environment just as a plant cannot grow in unfertile soil.”²

Before a receptive audience, Vishinsky insisted on the intentions of the Soviet Union: “a new conflagration is neither in our interest nor in the interest of smaller peoples. We must build a dam against such attempts.” His companions agreed. Virologist Ștefan Nicolau and newly appointed minister of Health, neurosurgeon Dumitru Bagdasar, underlined the imperative of “a prophylactic cordon”/ “cordon sanitaire” against Germany. Vishinsky was happy to take the cue from his interlocutors: “A cordon sanitaire that will not allow birds of prey to pass. This is the role of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, whose sincere friendship we want.” The meeting ended with the Soviet guest reassuring the Romanians about comrade Stalin’s sincere interest in the activity of ARLUS.³

Introduction

The tale opening this chapter nicely summarizes the main issues I wish to discuss. On the one hand, I will focus on the relationship between the politics of popular democracy and post-1944 discourses of national

² “O delegație a ARLUS-ului primită de D.A.I. Vâșinski,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 96/1945, 10–11.

³ Ibid., 12–13.

renewal. On the other hand, I will emphasize the connection between the national policies of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) and intellectuals' self-representation in the aftermath of what Jan Gross once called "the revolutionary experience"⁴ of World War II.

I argue that the period between 1944 and 1947 was defined by a phenomenon of socialist-patriotic palingenesis.⁵ Both the party and the intellectuals engaged in discourses of national renewal at the time. Narratives of postwar reconstruction were inextricably linked with programs of social reform and defascization, while simultaneously advancing a more de-ethnicized vision of the national body. Such discourses were essentially founded on integrative negatives—the rejection of all that was perceived to have led to the continuum of dictatorship, to fascism, to the war on the Eastern front, and to underdevelopment. Such

⁴ Jan T. Gross, "Foreword," in Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948*, trans. and annotated by John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), x.

⁵ My theoretical interpretation is in agreement with Stefano Bottoni's characterization of the interwar Romanian Communist Party (PCdR) as "an extremist movement that fought against the current reality while waiting for a revolutionary palingenesis from the outside, from the Soviet Union" (60). Bottoni also defined the national-communist hybridization during the later years of Gheorghiu Gheorghiu-Dej's rule as "ethnosocial palingenesis" (299 and 301). Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania roșie. Comunismul român și problema națională 1944–1965* (Cluj: Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2010). I argued elsewhere that, by 1965, both in the party ranks and among epistemic communities, "two eschatologies had met: that of the vanguard people successfully building socialism in one country thus inching closer to communism; and, that of the national being that emerges victorious from the birth-pangs of history." See Bogdan C. Iacob, "Defining the Nation. History, Identity, Communism in Romania (1964–1966)," *Studia Universitas Historia* 56, no. 2 (December 2011): 4. My interpretation of "national palingenesis" for the case of Romanian communism relies on several works about doctrines and mythologies of rebirth from the right: Armin Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelului Mihail": Mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), Marius Turda, "Conservative Palingenesis and Cultural Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Romania," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 4 (2008): 437–53, and Constantin Iordachi, "God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania" in *Comparative Fascist Studies*, ed. by Constantin Iordachi. *New Perspective* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 316–55.

political and intellectual trends in Romanian society were unavoidably influenced by Romania's proximity and unprecedented exposure to the newly victorious Soviet civilization.

During these years, the new national narratives advanced by Romanian communists were reflected into and responded to a horizon of expectations manifested in certain areas of the public sphere. In the context of the authoritarianism from 1938 until 1944, the massive impact of a home-grown fascist movement (the Iron Guard), state-sponsored antisemitism and heavy involvement in the Holocaust as well as the massive human and material losses of the war, many Romanian intellectuals talked about renewal and about moving away from a tainted, compromised past. Because of ideological commitment, personal contexts, or simply lack of alternatives, the possibility for a popular, socialist democracy put forward by the National Democratic Front (created by the communists in October 1944) was a valid option that responded to their longing for a new beginning.

The wartime ethos of these intellectual circles is maybe best expressed by former avant-garde poet and member of the communist party since 1933 Miron Radu Paraschivescu. Paraschivescu, whose journal provides fascinating insights into local debates about communism, fascism, and the ideological storms from 1940 to the mid-1950s, was not a single-minded true believer. He criticized Stalin, the Soviet–Nazi non-aggression pact, the Romanian communist party's attempt to curtail freedom of expression, and he was later disillusioned with state socialism. He was deeply involved in the cultural debates of the second half of the 1940s and was member of the leadership of the Writers' Union during the 1950s and 1960s. On February 19, 1940, he noted in his journal that "we live a terrible epoch of disaggregation. We are . . . a generation with no purpose. . . . [We] all live the tragedy of this people and country, at the crossroads of times and world, with no axis or foundation." His conclusion chillingly anticipated the swift, seismic transformations that started four years later: "I believe that nothing, absolutely nothing, outside of a universal revolution will give us the absolute certitude which we thirst for."⁶

⁶ Miron Radu Paraschivescu, *Ţurnalul unui cobai (1940–1954)*, (Cluj: Dacia, 1994), 14.

My focus on socialist-patriotic palingenesis reflects the chapter's main motivation: the reappraisal of established narratives about the Romanian communist party's policies and positions between 1944 and 1948. The well-worn story is that of an antinational, Soviet lackey type of political agent that violently took over power and Sovietized the country. The relationship between communism and nationalism in Romania has been extensively discussed in the scholarship. However, one fundamental element has been ignored by most authors, the present one included: the interplay between communist/left-wing discourses and visions of national revival from the 1930s until the late 1940s and its impact on the long-term evolution of state socialism in Romania. There is an agreement in the existing scholarship that the hybridization between communism and nationalism in Romania began in the mid- to late 1950s.⁷ I contend in this contribution that one needs to significantly revisit such standpoint: many actors involved in the hybridization process (especially in the 1960s and 1970s) had essentially formulated by the late 1940s their main ideas about the profile of a national project from the left.⁸

⁷ The most important contributions to this discussion are: Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Dennis Deletant, *Romania Under Communist Rule* (Bucharest: The Civic Academy Foundation, 1998); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005); Dragoș Petrescu, "Building the Nation, Instrumentalizing Nationalism: Revisiting Romanian National-Communism," in *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy in Europe, 1918–1989*, ed. by Martin Mevius (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), 145–64; Vladimir Tismaneanu, "What Was National Stalinism?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. by Dan Stone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 462–79.

⁸ I owe the term *hybridization* to David Brandenberger. For details see his *National Bolshevism. Stalinist Mass and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2002) and *Propaganda State in Crisis. Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and terror under Stalin, 1927–1941* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2011).

In a timely article, Stefano Bottoni signaled out several aspects that have been often overlooked in the discussion of Romania's Sovietization: "the only apparent antinomy between violence and consent, the remarkable extent of administrative and psychological continuity over the transition years, and the fuzzy relationship between the PCR's need for national legitimacy and its internationalist stance powered by the party's multiethnic composition." The historian made a crucial remark in stating that "the PCR and the Petru Groza-led procommunist government behaved as a multiethnic entity pursuing integrative policies."⁹ Indeed, during the troubled years of World War II's early aftermath, calls for ethnic cooperation and coexistence distinguished the PCR and its allies from the center-right-wing opposition parties. This way the party could claim support both among ethnic Romanians and non-Romanians. As historian Michal Kopeček remarks in his chapter in the present volume, patriotic discourse was a crucial instrument of communist propaganda in Eastern Europe. It allowed these parties to consolidate their credibility among the population.

Socialist Patriotism Revisited

The new wave of literature on "socialist patriotism" combined with a rereading of the second half of the 1940s provide the basis for a reinterpretation of the communist experience in Romania, and more generally, in the former socialist bloc. Several studies over fifteen years have reset the discussion of the relationship between nationalism and communism in the first decade of the socialist construction in Eastern Europe. Carol Lilly,¹⁰ Bradley Abrams,¹¹ Martin

⁹ Stefano Bottoni, "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management," *East European Politics and Societies*. 24, 1 (Winter 2010): 60.

¹⁰ Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944–1953* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001). Also see Nick Miller, *The Nonconformists. Culture, Politics, and Nationalism in a Serbian Intellectual Circle, 1944–1991* (New York/Budapest: CEU Press, 2007).

¹¹ Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (New York/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Harvard Cold War Book Series, 2004).

Mevius,¹² Yannis Sygkelos,¹³ Dirk Spilker,¹⁴ Jan Behrends,¹⁵ Michal Kopeček,¹⁶ or Sigrid Meuschel¹⁷ showed that the transfer of Soviet models was accompanied by the reconstruction of national representation in polities that sought both a local identity and adaptation to shifting principles of internationalism in the Soviet bloc. Since the development of the doctrine of the Popular Front, communist parties claimed to represent the social and national interests of their respective peoples. In the early postwar era, in Eastern Europe, as popular democracies were created, the role of the *national* changed under the impact, first, of the brief period of “national paths to socialism” and, second, of Soviet-centered internationalism of the Cominform. Nevertheless, a constant preoccupation throughout the region was the substantiation of the principle of socialist patriotism. It was rooted in the Soviet Union’s and Comintern’s emphasis, after the Nazi invasion of 1941, on World War II as an antifascist, patriotic war. More-

¹² Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941–1953* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).

¹³ Yannis Sygkelos, *Nationalism from the Left. The Bulgarian Communist Party during the Second World War and the Early Post-War Years* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011). Also, Alex Toshakov, “On the Inadequacy of the Ethnic/Civic Antinomy: The Language Politics of Bulgarian Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2009): 277–98.

¹⁴ Dirk Spilker, *The East German Leadership and the German Division of Germany. Patriotism and Propaganda 1945–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Jan C. Behrends, “Nation and Empire: Dilemmas of Legitimacy during Stalinism in Poland (1941–1956),” in Mevius, ed., *The Communist Quest*, 67–90. Also see by the same author “Agitation, Organization, Mobilization: The League for Polish–Soviet Friendship in Stalinist Poland,” in Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and A. E. Rees, *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008) and “The Stalinist *volonté générale*: Legitimizing Communist Statehood (1935–1952). A Comparative Perspective on the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany,” *East Central Europe* 40, 1 (2013): 37–73.

¹⁶ Michal Kopeček, “Historical Studies of Nation-Building and the Concept of Socialist Patriotism in East-Central Europe, 1956–1970,” in Pavel Kolář and Miloš Řezník, *Historische nationforschung im geteilten Europa 1945–1989* (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2012). Also see Michal Kopeček’s contribution in the present volume.

¹⁷ Sigrid Meuschel and Barbara Könczöl, “Sacralization of Politics in the GDR,” *Telos*, no. 136 (Fall 2006): 25–58.

over, the Kremlin initially envisaged the war's immediate aftermath as a time for national unity—one that included communist, left-wing forces. It was the only way to avoid civil war, stabilize the gains of the Red Army, and to contain Western influence in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁸

The underlying element of a postwar consensus for the realignment of the national body was local decision-makers' and intellectual elites' willingness to reform and reforge individual and collective selves. A Romanian manifesto for the military and the intellectuals from 1944 formulated the crux of the matter: "only by merging with the popular masses, only by proving that they eliminated any trace of wavering and speculation, only if they will fight life and death for the interests of the entire people, so that Romania can become free, democratic, and independent, only in such ways can [intellectuals] fulfill their role as honest patriots, respected and appreciated by the entire people."¹⁹ It was argued that the war and the continuum of dictatorship had left a profound imprint on the population, in the country's politics and on its intellectuals. The democratization heralded by the communists and/or by the National Democratic Front was to eliminate these "poisons" of the past.

On December 9, 1945 Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (the communist minister of justice between 1944 and 1948, later purged and executed, and, by the end of the 1960s, a symbol of local national-communism) called for "a critical appraisal of the past," of the intelligentsia's anti-semitism, mysticism, conservatism, or obscurantism. Under the new circumstances, intellectuals inevitably were summoned to reconsider their position toward the communist party and the working class. The new national ideal was supposed to be achieved by "elevating the masses to a conscious life" and Romanian society could only survive as a democracy. Such "genuine democratization" opened "immense possibilities of creative work for intellectuals."²⁰

¹⁸ Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism 1917–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111–55.

¹⁹ "Asupra proiectului de apel către intelectuali și militari" ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 65/1944.

²⁰ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Poziția Partidului Comunist Român față de intelectuali* (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Comunist Român, 1946), 5, 13–14.

The idea of democracy as the only option for the postwar order dominated cultural debates. Miron Radu Paraschivescu contended in the main party newspaper *Scînteia* (Summer, 1946) for “a one-way culture,” one essentially geared toward a democracy in which “intellectuals found the true meaning of their lives only by the people’s side.” Their salvation could come only from “the arduous collaboration with the toiling masses.”²¹ The opponents of the communist inspired new democracy were, in the words of literary critic Ion Vitner, the advocates of “political and social suicide.” He continued: “the Romanian people have been on the threshold of suicide between 1941 and 1944.” But as times were changing, “a new circuit pulsates in artistic life.”²²

Unsurprisingly, one of the most encountered catch-phrases in public debates was that of “new humanism.” As writer and journalist Tudor Teodorescu Braniște remarked at the beginning of 1946, “we need a new man, better and more just than the one of 1939. Humanity is the first step toward civilization and it is the threshold of democracy. . . . Nobody tore the weeds of war yet from the human spirit. On the contrary. Many continue, consciously or without realizing it, in similar ways.”²³ Braniște, despite his left leanings and presidency of ARLUS’s press section, was apprehensive about politically engaged literature. His newspaper, *Jurnalul de Dimineată* would be suspended for his reservations toward the Soviet Union. Before 1945, he had also criticized the show trials in Moscow.

Young philosopher, Mircea Florian, a social democrat, went further. He talked about the twilight of a civilization, “which, through the countless suffering and the destruction it provoked, proved to be merely a step, a hallway, a phase that must be overcome so that humanity can regain its health and capacity to enjoy life, its material and moral accomplishments.”²⁴ The wreckage of the war invited a new world essentially defined, according to art critic Petru Comarnescu, by “a unity between human benevolence and fierce constructivity [*con-*

²¹ Quoted in Ana Selejan, *Trădarea intelectualilor. Reeducare și prigoană* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2005), 143–44.

²² Ibid., 201–202.

²³ Mircea Florian, “Spre un nou umanism,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, vol. 13, (Jan. 1946), 205.

²⁴ Ibid., 204–205.

structivitate] never encountered before in history.”²⁵ For literary historian Tudor Vianu, the founding element of this new age was “the profound human belief in the ethic of work as the development of the labor force.”²⁶

At the dawn of such creativity, intellectuals mediated the moral and material renewal of the country. Writer Felix Aderca remarked that there was only one fate for those who failed to rise to such challenge: “History will overwhelm them, for it overcame more serious obstacles in its inexorable path.”²⁷ With a broad brush, these were the discursive premises of the ethos of socialist-patriotic palingenesis.

A Party in Search of Intellectuals

Historian Lucian Boia diagnosed the quicksands upon which Romanian intellectuals projected identities both for themselves and for the national community from the 1930s onwards. According to Boia, “Romania’s transformation from its foundations, which took place at a dizzying pace, generated great upheaval among the intellectual elite. All will find themselves in situations that they could not have even imagined in the previous years. Some will choose better, others worse, according to principles, according to interests . . . or history will choose for them, without asking for their consent.”²⁸ Despite his judicious assertion, Boia leaned toward the predominant role of personal interest rather than ideas as the driving force behind the various posi-

²⁵ Petru Comarnescu in Ion Biberi, *Lumea de mâine*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2001), 300. Biberi’s volume was the result of a series of interviews with some of the most high-profile Romanian intellectuals in 1944 and 1945 about the outlook of the postwar world, i.e., “the world of tomorrow.” The collection is indicative of the rapid realignment of local intellectuals and for the state of mind in the immediate aftermath of the war.

²⁶ Tudor Vianu in Biberi, *Lumea de mâine*, 113.

²⁷ Quoted in Georgiana Leșu, “Instituționalizarea ‘prieteniei’ între România și Uniunea Sovietică. Aspecte din activitatea A.R.L.U.S.” in *Represiune și control social în România comunistă*. Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc, vols. V–VI, 2010–2011 (Bucharest: Polirom, 2011), 313–14.

²⁸ Lucian Boia, *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011).

tions adopted by this elite either during the mid-1940s or earlier. However, he refreshingly pointed out the communists' methodical commitment to promoting and being represented by high-profile intellectuals and "people of culture" (*oameni de cultură*). In contrast, this was not among the priorities of other parties not affiliated with the NDF.

Communist poet, Mihai Beniuc, at one point head of the Romanian Writers' Union, remarked in his memoirs (written in 1975, but published in 1999) that he and his generation (he was thirty-eight in 1945) would not have been able to "meet the tasks posed by the party" because "our lack of renown and prestige" in the eyes of the general public. But he quickly added: "I believe that our great luck was that the older generation of writers . . . those writers who paid some tribute [to the previous dictatorships], but not something serious, suddenly moved toward the party and responded to its call. It was after all natural [for this to happen]." ²⁹ We are back to the issue underlined in the introduction—the integrative policies of the PCR.

A possible solution towards cutting the Gordian knot of opportunism vs. belief in the interpretations of intellectuals' involvement in various authoritarian regimes during the twentieth century might be to re-assess our vantage point by focusing more on the evolution of their beliefs and on the impact of political dynamics on their *Bildung*. Their involvement with extremist movements was undoubtedly motivated by ideological commitment, but things were far from simple. Often, a regime met the expectations of an intellectual (used here as a generic label) in specific ways in accordance with his/her activity and ideas of societal change, collective and individual identity, or of cultural transformation. I believe that this approach allows us, for the Romanian case and in general, to avoid overinstrumentalized or unilateral "primacy of ideology" readings of the relationship between intellectuals and Utopia in the twentieth century. ³⁰

²⁹ Mihai Beniuc, *Sub patru dictaturi. Memorii (1940–1975)* (Bucharest: Editura "Ion Cristoiu", 1999), 55–56.

³⁰ Michael David-Fox, "The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The 'Cultured West' through Soviet Eyes," *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (June 2003): 300–35 and *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Going back to the Romanian case, the leaders of the party were fully aware of the potential legitimacy in the overlap between their discourse about national renewal and reform and similar tendencies in certain circles of the public sphere. On January 28, 1945, during her final remarks at the first conference of the propaganda sectors, Ana Pauker underlined that

some [intellectuals], who are more enlightened, feel that it cannot work this way anymore, but not all understand and see *how* things must function differently. To this [question] “how it must be different,” we are confronted with a series of lies, prejudices, suspicions, attempts to hinder this “different” (*altfel*), and with reactionaries . . . who consciously and decidedly want to keep the wheel of the world, of history from rolling. They often acquire followers who should not be with them and this happens because of certain fears, suspicions. We do not know how to coach them walk with us; furthermore, through our inability and unpreparedness, we put the fear in them, which should not happen.³¹

Pauker, a symbol of Romanian interwar communism and the most visible member of the party leadership until 1947 based on her prominent wartime position within the Comintern,³² did not hesitate to connect national survival with the fulfillment of the country’s democratization in the context of an unwavering friendship with the Soviet Union. In September 1944, at a meeting with the representatives of the Social-Democratic Party, Pauker empathically proclaimed that “we cannot give up on our friendship with the Soviet Union. We must not give up on [establishing] a democratic regime in the country, because if we do so it will mean totally abandoning Romania.”³³ Freshly liberated from prison, future party secretary and undisputed communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej reinforced the pronouncement of his comrade:

³¹ “Stenograma Conferinței de propagandă a PCR pe țară din 28 ianuarie 1945,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cămară, dosar 4/1945, 129.

³² Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker. The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

³³ “Stenograma Conferinței de propagandă a PCR pe țară din 28 ianuarie 1945,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cămară, dosar 4/1945, 131.

“anybody who will rise and try to break this front will reveal himself as an enemy of the entire people . . . because the activity of the united front of the communist and the social-democratic parties is identical with the interests of the Romanian people. . . . We do not live anymore in those times when we bow before some resistance coming from reactionary elements, from bourgeois parties.”³⁴

These quotations, along with many similar others from various internal documents of the Central Committee archive, reveal a common effort of Romanian communist bigwigs, regardless of their origin (Romanian or coming from one of the minorities) or provenience (from prisons, from the underground, or Moscow), to find a national, inclusive discourse about the transformation of Romania into a popular democracy. Across East Central Europe, “a clear link was established between the idea of anti-fascist democracy, the search for a national dimension to the communist parties, and the USSR’s foreign-policy interests.”³⁵ What should not be ignored is the extent to which there was opposition to this understanding of socialist patriotism. Especially among younger communists and the lower-rungs of the party there was preference for more proletarian visions about the national community, which was seen through the lens of class struggle.³⁶

Nevertheless, the party leadership at the time considered intellectuals essential to the NDF’s project of national reconstruction. In July 1945, at another meeting with the representatives of the propaganda departments, the member of the Politburo in charge with this section of the Central Committee, Iosif Chişinevschi, defined the intellectuals’ role in two stages. He first expressed the imperative of the (re-) education of the masses: “we must know what they think, what they

³⁴ “Sedința cu Social-Democrații din ziua de 30 septembrie 1944,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cămară, dosar 12/1944, 3 and 13.

³⁵ Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 137.

³⁶ Romanian historian Adrian Cioflâncă showed how Nicolae Ceaușescu, the future dictator of Romania, was dismissed in 1945 from the leadership of the Communist Youth Organization because of his unwillingness to adopt a front-like attitude. See Cioflâncă’s chapter on mass organizations in Vladimir Tismaneanu et al., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România – Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 176–98. On the radicalism of young communist intellectuals, after August 1944, at *Scînteia*, the main party newspaper, see Ștefan Bosomitu, *Miron Constantinescu. O biografie* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 116–22.

want, what they wish for, which are their habits. On this basis we will know how to act based on concrete facts and ... we will show them how much the Romanian people suffered because of this chauvinism..." He then went on to describe how and why intellectuals should be co-opted: "we need intellectuals for cultural development, for the social elevation of the masses in our country. We need intellectuals for various branches of the economy, industry, culture, and science. . . . Obviously, these things have to be well prepared so that we would not fall to the extremes. The Party being a Party of the Proletariat, it will maintain its proletarian character. They will receive communist education; we will not take them indiscriminately."³⁷

The fact that the party leaders agonized over whether intellectuals should become party members did not mean that their understanding of this category was solely perceived in the framework of party-mindedness (*partiinost*). Not yet at least; not until the end of 1947.

The processes of re forging the self in the context of a developing popular democracy was almost physically described and exemplified by journalist George Macovescu. He was an individual with an ideologically dubious past. He had been very active in state-sponsored cultural policies both during Carol II's dictatorship and in Mihai Antonescu's Ministry of Propaganda. He was even member of a delegation that visited Germany for a month in 1942. In March 1945, he became general secretary of the Ministry of Propaganda. Some in the party claimed that he was there as an undercover agent. He did have a background as a communist-sympathizer during the 1930s. Between 1959 and 1961, Macovescu was Romania's ambassador to the US and from 1972 until 1978 he held the position of minister of foreign affairs.³⁸

In October 1946, Macovescu was fully involved in the process of constructing a critical mass of intellectuals that would back the new order, even though they were not party-members. He formulated his views at a meeting of the Committee for Arts and Culture, the de facto

³⁷ "Proces verbal al ședinței cu responsabilii resoartelor Propagandă și Agitație ale Comitetelor județene P.C.R. din întreaga țară care a avut loc în zilele de 11–14 iulie 1945," 11–14 iulie 1945, ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cămară, dosar 61/1946.

³⁸ George Macovescu, *Jurnal. Vol. I (1952–1982)* (Bucharest: Domino, 2006).

Ministry of Culture. He urged for “revisiting the manner in which we work with the people of culture and from the arts.” He continued

the way politics were done in our country is a cause for their [intellectuals] lack of consciousness. They are eminences, some greater than others, a mass over which lay the cinder of the times, of the countless politics that were pursued and of which they were part . . . in order to have their daily bread. . . . They are eminences, they are precious stones . . . if we will try to forcefully remove the cinder, we will scratch them . . . and so we will destroy them. . . . We should be able to draw near to these people, to speak their language. If we want to catch them with a hook, they will die. And we approach them brusquely and even now we behave with such harshness. . . . We can even attract enemies; in the field of the arts it is easier for them to transform.³⁹

Macovescu’s position was endorsed during the meeting by the future head of the Party History Institute (from 1961 until 1989), Ion Popescu-Puțuri. The latter stressed that “we must overlook these sins, if we want to have writers. [If we do not] we will be stuck with those fringe writers. . . . We must have broad views, as comrade Macovescu said. We must be very careful how we behave with artists in general. . . . America does not have a culture of its own, but knows how to appreciate people.”⁴⁰ Such reasoning was ultimately sanctioned by the head of the Romanian Agitation and Propaganda Department, Iosif Chișinevschi. He concluded the mid-1946 meeting by urging the activists “not to be rigid, some should be accepted into the party, while others should be given an income under various circumstances, but we must not let them fall into the hands of the reactionaries. We must not let them destroy their future, especially if one made only a mistake not a crime.”⁴¹

Interestingly enough, Chișinevschi’s reasoning was founded on an exchange on the topic with Gheorghiu-Dej after the party’s National Congress in autumn 1945. Dej had told Chișinevschi that “we must

³⁹ “Stenograma ședinței Comitetului de artă și cultură – 11 octombrie 1946,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cămară, dosar 54/1946, 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43–44.

⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

not toy with artists (*oameni de artă*); I do not know, maybe we should be forgiving toward artists.” He did express reservations, formulating a rule that will apply, to varying degrees, in the co-option process throughout the communist period: “if we bring in these people, it does not mean that they will have leadership positions or that they will join the party.”⁴² Intellectuals, especially those whose primary socialization was in the pre-1945 period, would populate various high-rank positions within the cultural and scientific establishment. Simultaneously, their subordination to the party’s politburo and central committee remained unambiguous.

Institutions for New Times

By the end of 1944, the Romanian communist party’s focus on high profile members of the intelligentsia was so striking that dissenters complained about elitism within mass organizations controlled by the communists. The most prominent target was ARLUS. This institution was created at the initiative of a group of left-wing intellectuals, who greatly benefited from the support of the communist party’s newly established propaganda structures. It was officially founded in October 1944. It built on the various interwar attempts to create an association of friendship with the USSR.⁴³ The party’s Agitprop section was initially undecided on the exact outlook of the Association. It oscillated between the pre-1945 format of “Friends of the USSR” [*Amicii URSS*] and the formula “the Romanian–Soviet Association.”⁴⁴ In the end, the name chosen, ALRUS, was much more neutral allowing for the co-option of individuals with more diverse political affiliations.

⁴² Dej quoted by Chișinevschi, in *ibid.*

⁴³ For details on the procommunist/Soviet associations from the interwar period, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) or Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lui ‘tanti Varvara. Istorii clandestine* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005). On ARLUS, see Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, 106–48 and Georgiana Leșu, “Instituționalizarea ‘prieteniei’,” 313–25.

⁴⁴ “Propuneri asociație de cunoaștere reciprocă româno-sovietică,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 58/1944, 1–3.

In mid-1945, almost a year after deposing Marshall Ion Antonescu and Romania joining the Allies, Ofelia Manole, the future deputy head of the AgitProp, remarked “this organization ARLUS worked only with the peaks. . . . It did not seek to popularize the Soviet Union among the peasants, workers, and the masses of the petit-bourgeoisie . . . ARLUS was perceived only as an organization of university professors. . . . I believe that the ARLUS newspaper is not a popular newspaper. *Veac Nou* (“The New Century”) can be understood only by scholars.”⁴⁵ Her complaints seemed justified: half of the group that had the initiative to create the organization was made up of university professors. The structure of ARLUS invited such dominance, especially among the leadership. It had twelve sections, each with subsequent subsections: economics (with no less than ten subsections), sciences, literature and philosophy, applied sciences (with seven subsections), social sciences (five subsections), army, transportation and communications, education, press, propaganda, the arts, and sport and tourism (with a myriad of subsections). With such a catch-all outlook and considering the political environment in 1945, it is unsurprising that the ARLUS leadership and membership represented “a genuine *who’s who* of the country’s public life.”⁴⁶ It was an institution crucial for Romania’s self-Sovietization,⁴⁷ as local intellectuals adapted a Soviet model (the VOKS) and pursued activities that were not solely structured based on the communist party’s guidance.

All things considered, the party seemed content with ARLUS’s headway among both the intellectuals and the masses. A report of the general secretary of the Association noted, in September 1946, that “it grew roots fast among most varied social strata and it rose to a level of prestige that no such association ever had in Romania. It fast

⁴⁵ “Ședința cu responsabiliile organizațiilor de masă – 9 iulie 1945,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, dosar 59/1945, 4.

⁴⁶ Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, 124.

⁴⁷ John Connelly, *Captive Universities. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 45. Also see Norman Naimark, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume I, Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195–97.

became one of the most remarkable such associations in Europe.”⁴⁸ At the beginning of 1947, ARLUS counted over 140,000 members, an increase of 40,000 members since October 1946. The party was so taken by the apparent success of the organization that by the end of 1947 they planned to have 500,000 members.⁴⁹ Of course, the elections of November 1946, which officialized the communist takeover, incentivized prospective members, while the party’s ability to impose its influence over the society grew exponentially.

A month after King Michael was forced to abdicate, the Association counted 678,764 members. By April 1950, its president, C.I. Parhon proudly announced a massive membership of 4,200,000.⁵⁰ The institution had become conterminous to the national community. One Romanian historian judiciously commented that ARLUS acquired ever greater visibility “as a large section of Romanian intelligentsia came to terms with the idea to walk hand in hand with the political left.”⁵¹

One element that stands out in relation to ARLUS is its leadership’s perception of the role of the Soviet *exemplum* in national dynamics of democratization. In August 1946, there was a debate in the association’s General Leadership Council on the whether ARLUS should also focus on internal politics. Physiologist Daniel Danielopolu, a former minister of the Rădescu⁵² government, a prominent member of

⁴⁸ “Raportul Secretarului General în fața Consiliului General de conducere – Activitatea filialelor ARLUS în timpul de la 1 august până la 12 septembrie 1946,” 6.

⁴⁹ N. Popescu Doreanu, “Raport de activitate pe luna ianuarie 1947 ARLUS” 31 ianuarie 1947, ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 1/1947, f. 2. The decision to expand ARLUS to nation-wide membership was similar to the process that was taking place in Poland in 1947. On October 1947, the Central Committee of the PCR (Polish Communist Party) decided to transform *Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Radzieckiej* (TPPR – Society for Polish–Soviet Friendship), founded on November 1944, into a mass organization of unprecedented dimensions. Most probably similar processes were taking place across the region. See Behrends, “Nation and Empire,” 74–76.

⁵⁰ Leșu, “Instituționalizarea “prieteniei,” 315.

⁵¹ Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx*, 148.

⁵² Nicolae Rădescu, a career military man, was the last non-NDF prime minister. He was forced to resign the premiership in February 1945. In June 1946 he left the country. He died in New York seven years later. Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania’s Communist Takeover. The Rădescu Government* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1994).

the liberal party, but also one of the six vice presidents of ARLUS, objected to the Association's involvement in local matters. After a heated debate, all the members of the Leadership Council unanimously voted against Danielopolu's petition (including Danielopolu himself). They decided that "the friendship with the Soviet Union was not a subject of foreign policy separate from the problem of national democracy. On the contrary, it is at the core of our country's democracy, independence, and progress."⁵³ In other words, "the Romanian–Soviet friendship should be based on the interests of our people's national life, on the overlap of interest between democratic Romania and the USSR."⁵⁴

The general policy lines of ARLUS were disseminated in the communist-controlled newspapers as well as through newspapers that reflected the front-policy of popular democracy. At the beginning of 1947, ARLUS had established an agreement of collaboration with the Royal Cultural Foundations. The latter boasted a highly influential magazine with a long tradition of elite contributors: the *Review of the Royal Foundations* (Revista Fundațiilor Regale, *RFR*), arguably the flagship cultural journal of Romania. I believe that this periodical, because of its semi-official (if not all-out official) status of organ of the popular democratic alternative, is an excellent example of the overlap between the socialist patriotic discourse of the party, calls for national renewal on the side of the intellectuals, policies of national integration between 1944 and 1947. It might be argued that *RFR* functioned as a showcase of the new popular democracy's visions of culture, nation, and politics.

Until 1947, the communist leaders were careful not to be too intrusive with a magazine that was symbolic for the role and status of the monarchy in the new Romania. For example, a day before the nomination of the Groza government, on March 5, 1945, one of the most important communist leaders, Vasile Luca, insisted at a meeting

⁵³ "Raportul Secretarului General în fața Consiliului General de conducere – Activitatea filialelor ARLUS în timpul de la 1 august până la 12 septembrie 1946," ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 42/1946, 6–7.

⁵⁴ N. Popescu-Dorneanu, "Raport asupra muncii ARLUS în campania electorală pe luni iulie și august 1946," 31 august, ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, dosar 42/1946, 2.

of the NDF Council that “we must know that the historical development of the past decades has shown that a monarchy can be much more democratic than a fascist republic. We are not focused on form, but on content. If we can give a democratic content, for the progressive development in the future, we are not for the destruction of the state.”⁵⁵ These statements reflected the spirit of the times: the Soviet-inspired commitment of local communist parties to gradualism and national unity. In January the same year, Stalin met a group of Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists and instructed them “to forget the idea that the victory of socialism could be realized only through Soviet rule.” Stalin’s additional comments show where Luca found inspiration for his directives. According to the generalissimo in Kremlin, socialism “could be presented by some other political systems—for example by a democracy, a parliamentary republic and even by constitutional monarchy.”⁵⁶

Recipe for Renewal

The agreement between the Royal Foundations and ARLUS was a sign of the increased dominance (if not total control) of the communists over the cultural field and the rapid disappearance of loci of opposition. The articles published in the *RFR* exemplify a double process of reinterpretation: 1) of the national canon from the point of view of a prospective social/popular democracy; 2) of public identities. The publication is an ideal medium for observing the evolution of the supposedly progressive culture in tune with the transformations of the postwar world, i.e. the intensifying focus on the *exemplum* of the Soviet civilization.

In February 1946, literary critic Perpessicius (Dumitru Panaitescu), wrote an article in which he distinguished between the post-

⁵⁵ “Ședința Consiliului FND din 5 martie 1945,” ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, dosar 13/1945, 11–12.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Roberts, “Stalin’s Wartime Vision of the Peace, 1939–1945,” in Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon, eds., *Stalin and Europe. Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 248.

war model of patriotism from (pre)war nationalism. His starting point was Ion Luca Caragiale, a late nineteenth-century writer who was included in the cultural canon of the young popular-democracy mainly because of his critique of bourgeois society.⁵⁷ Perpessicius used Caragiale's ironical term, "the good Romanian," in order to criticize (pre-) war nationalism. Such an individual was he who sacrificed reform and progress for the sake of fanciful external threats against the nation. The "good Romanian" was he who thought: "the common enemy is the foreigner! Down with foreign—ism! Long live Rrromanianism! Anybody who thinks differently is a traitor." Even after the war, Perpessicius argued, "the good Romanian" did not understand the errors of his ways "after years and years of meanderings that brought us not on the brink, but at the bottom of the ravine." The literary critic's solution was "moral reeducation, rehumanization, or better said reintegration within our own limits." He then continued by giving basically a standard definition of socialist patriotism as perceived by intellectuals that were warming up to the seemingly unavoidable consolidation of an NDF regime: "we should try to be only the children of this country, with no distinction of kin, religion, or social class, to agree to be first human beings first and foremost. We ought to primarily understand, once and for all, that sincere nationalism does not exclude (on the contrary) loving your fellow human beings, regardless of who they are, to which latitude, hemisphere, regardless of the season of history."⁵⁸

One cannot miss the reference to national communion across class separations. Such statement echoed communist dominated national front integrative policies. Democratization, as advertised in 1946 and early 1947, emphasized social emancipation against perceived class egotism and privilege. Perpessicius's pronouncement reflected the idea of a *social* democracy. Romanian literary historian Angelo Mitchievici remarked, in his volume about local intellectuals' trips to and books about the Soviet Union, that "the first writers to travel to the USSR after 1945 stressed the continuity and not the radical break with bour-

⁵⁷ Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă, 1948–1953* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 122–25.

⁵⁸ Perpessicius, "Jurnal de lector – Bunul Roman...la telefon," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, an. 13, februarie 1946, 341–44.

geois society. This is the argument on which they based their advocacy of Romania's rapprochement with the USSR."⁵⁹

In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviet neighbor could not be ignored. Its civilizational model was often presented as a resource for lessons to rid the society of its inequalities and abuses. In this narrative, intellectuals themselves were victims of the very same social-political system that had brought disaster upon the country since the end of the 1930s.⁶⁰ Or, to quote sociologist Dimitrie Gusti's pronouncement in 1945 (three years later he lost both his Academy and university positions), "if we want the world of tomorrow to have a permanent character, it must be built on economic and social factors."⁶¹

I believe that historian Krystyna Kersten's remark for Poland, during the same years I am dealing with in this chapter, can easily apply to Romania as well as to other East European countries. Kersten stated that "it is important to recall that the Communists and their allies did not merely publicize their platforms, they carried out, at least in part, the democratic slogans of the left."⁶² The ethos of social transformation, as a prerequisite to national renewal and detachment from the sins of the past, struck a chord with Romanian intellectuals.

Between 1944 and 1947, another significant catchphrase, closely tied to that of "new humanism," was "social activism." Tudor Vianu's volume on *The Philosophy of Culture* generated a debate on the role of activism for the achievement of cultural progress. The literary historian argued that the Promethean myth lay at the basis of modern culture. Activism, as a will for knowledge, was the recipe for eradicating social-political evils.⁶³

In a review to this volume, Petru Comarnescu, the founder of the Criterion circle that brought together the 1927 generation, which had a massive impact on Romanian intellectual history,⁶⁴ refused to see activism as merely the will for knowledge. He advocated "a social

⁵⁹ Angelo Mitchievici, *Umbrele Paradisului. Scriitori români și francezi în Uniunea Sovietică* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 95. Also see his contribution in the present volume.

⁶⁰ Petre Pandrea in Biberi, *Lumea de mâine*, 250–51.

⁶¹ Biberi, *Lumea de mâine*, 74.

⁶² Kersten, *The Establishment of Communism*, 171.

⁶³ Tudor Vianu, *Filosofia culturii* (Bucharest: Publicon, 1945).

⁶⁴ See Vladimir Tismaneanu's contribution in this volume.

humanism, in which reason can be tuned into life, idea with feeling, the conscious merged with the subconscious, moral perfecting with historical becoming.”⁶⁵ Another author proposed a similar revision of Vianu’s activism as the enforcement of reason. Sanda Popescu considered activism the sole antidote “to restlessness and fright, which are the two maladies subverting the contemporary soul.” But she underlined that such cure will be effective only if directed toward social construction and emancipation.⁶⁶

From such interpretations there was only one step toward what philosopher Constantin Gulian called “the new ethics.” In the post-1949 period, Gulian became a “scientist-dictator,” a *praktik* in the field of philosophy and aesthetics. But in 1946, his theses caught the eye during cultural debates. He considered that “the new ethics” was based on a reconceptualization of political struggle, as the latter “was not only an end in itself, but a means and a path to a new world of values.” This was a novel form of “actionism,” one “different from fascist amorality” because it was founded on “the fact that the fulfillment of Necessity is in continuous relation with values.” Such new ethics allowed the new man “to act harshly” without moving away from “the criteria of equality.”⁶⁷

The specter of this threshold upon which “the new man is forced to act forcefully” was not missed by those intellectuals attracted by the NDF’s promises of social progress and reform. In his journal, Petru Comarnescu mused about his place in the new order that was rapidly taking shape: “I do not believe either in capitalism or in the bourgeoisie, I do not believe in imperialism, so I cannot be the henchman of those who support them. This is my tragedy: I will have to adhere to something that could be splendid if there would be freedom for artists and people of culture.”⁶⁸ With such doubts, it is no wonder that Comarnescu never managed to convince the party of his unwavering commitment, especially once the republic was proclaimed (by the

⁶⁵ Petru Comarnescu, “Soluția activistă în filosofia culturii,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, vol. 14, no. 4 (April 1947), 84.

⁶⁶ Sanda Popescu, “O filosofie a disperării: Activismul,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1947), 151–52.

⁶⁷ C. I. Gulian, “Introducere în ‘Etica nouă’,” *Viața Românească*, vol. XXX-VIII, no. 3 (1946).

⁶⁸ Quoted in Boia, *Capcanele*, 276.

end of 1947) and the people's democracy regime began. By 1952, he lost most of his jobs, hanging on only as external collaborator at the Institute of Linguistics working at the Romanian–Russian dictionary (1952–1954). After 1960, his fortunes begin to change as he gradually attained visibility through publications and cultural journalism. From 1966, he even traveled to Western Europe on official state assignments. As both sign of his desperation and willingness to integrate in the new regime, Comarnescu collaborated with the communist secret police (1953–1969), giving extensive reports that covered most of the Romanian cultural scene.⁶⁹

Returning to the early postwar, it should be emphasized, and Comarnescu's example is a case in point, that lucidity was not absent among those who joined in the socialist patriotic palingenesis of popular democracy. But alternatives were disappearing fast. History seemed to have ushered in a new era in which the Soviet civilizational model could not be ignored or all-out rejected anymore. A new form of collectivism seemed the precondition for the assertion of subjectivity in the national community. Philo-communist journalist Corin Grosu dwelled in *RFR*, in June 1946, on the new meaning of progress. For him, "if we want to have progress, educated people cannot limit themselves to a passive trust in the future . . . they must contribute to this general ascension to new peaks during which the people would get to acknowledge them as their sons. In this sense, intellectuals will serve the cause of progress, thus working for democracy, which always has the duty to turn its face toward those who have been left behind—the great masses."⁷⁰ In other words, national rebirth in popular democracy was dependent on the transformation of subjectivity of the agents of the nation.

Time seemed to be on the side of those who were willing to internalize the new developmental priorities. As linguist, philologist, and editor in chief of the *RFR*, Al. Rosetti wrote the following in an editorial marking the New Year's Eve between 1946 and 1947: "Democracy can be learnt. We will need time to prime ourselves and for this we need

⁶⁹ *Dosarele secrete ale agentului Anton. Petru Comarnescu în arhivele Securității*, selection, introduction, and comments by Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014).

⁷⁰ Corin Grosu, "Progresul," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* vol. 13, no. 6 (June 1946), 302.

educators who are well-prepared and enliven by a sacred fire.”⁷¹ The internalization of democratization was synonymous with self-liberation. Days before the King’s abdication, in the last issue of *RFR*, poet and translator Cicerone Theodorescu formulated the thrust of the transformative imperative weighing on intellectuals as popular democracy completely broke away from the past: “freed together with the entire people—after the fall from Walhalla of gods with unmythological plump thighs and short boots—creators gradually free themselves today, this second time on their own . . . from the prison of their own self.”⁷²

Between 1944 and 1947, through integrative politics as well as purges (also the country was occupied by the Red Army at the time), the communist-controlled NDF imposed its own program of national rebirth. For Romanian intelligentsia, young and old, visions of post-war reconstruction represented a viable path to finding an alternative to the continuum of dictatorship (1938–1944) and the profound crises of interwar democracy. On December 1944, the young journalist and essayist Virgil Ierunca, who enthusiastically embraced the possibility of a socialist-patriotic palingenesis, only to later flee the country and become one of the iconic figures of the democratic anticommunist exile, passionately proclaimed in the Christmas issue of journal *Victoria*: “There is today a frenzy to come down to earth, a joy, a competition to reveal to human beings the truth that their kingdom must not be sought after in the heavens, but only on earth.”⁷³ The ideals of social emancipation and the rejection of the past created the possibility of co-option. I believe that the head of the Agitprop, Iosif Chisinevski, best described in late 1946, the new tensions and requirements of national activism:

Romania today is a different Romania, and many people did not understand this fact, the fact that *our* Romania has other possibilities than in the past. . . . We can see that we have extensive

⁷¹ Al. Rosetti, “De Anul Nou,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1947), 83.

⁷² Cicerone Theodorescu, “Eliberarea creatorilor. Pe marginea celui de-al doilea Congres al ‘Uniunii’,” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, an. 14, no 12 (Dec. 1947), 72.

⁷³ Quoted in Selejan, *Trădarea intelectualilor*, 82.

possibilities to work, there are people who write, sing, dance, but we have yet to successfully show them enough so that they would realize that power comes from us. . . . We must not forget that, under the pressure of the events, people of the arts who have not been with us, who have been neutrals or were on the other side, in their large majority have begun to think differently.⁷⁴

The End of an Era

By 1948, as the Cold War and the two ideological camps were already in full operation mode, popular democracy's integrative socialist patriotic palingenesis took on the avatar of self-Sovietization. Class struggle became the primary criteria of national reconstruction. But, as historian Martin Mevius remarked, starting with 1948 "communist regimes did not burn their national flags but emblazoned them with communist symbols."⁷⁵ The symbolic hierarchy, until 1955, reinforced the Soviet-filtered principle of socialist patriotism. For example, during the first celebration of the week of the Romanian-Soviet friendship and at the May 1st demonstration in 1948, the proportion of Soviet to Romanian flags was 70 to 30 percent.⁷⁶

The idea of the working class as leader of the nation did not signify the end of socialist nationhood. For example, the most important historian of the communist regime between 1947 and 1955, Mihail Roller, sought to create a new canon for national history. He re-wrote it by altering its thematic signposts. In a brochure published in the first year of the people's democracy, Roller stated that "until now the

⁷⁴ "Stenograma ședinței Comitetului de artă și cultură – 11 octombrie 1946," ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, dosar 54/1946, f. 47, 51–52, and 60.

⁷⁵ Mevius, "Reappraising..." 14.

⁷⁶ Alexandru Aioanei, "'Săptămâna prieteniei româno-sovietice' (1–7 noiembrie 1948): Un prototip al sărbătorilor comuniste"; and Adrian Cioflâncă and Adriana Radu, "Instalarea comunismului văzută de la tribună și din stradă. mobilizare și represiune în România până la moartea lui Stalin" both in *Istoria recentă altfel. Perspective culturale*, ed. by Andi Mihalache and Adrian Cioflâncă (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2013), 287 and 299.

convulsions, the struggles, the creations of the people living in today's Romania were not included in our history." He therefore contended that "we cannot declare that we have a history of Romania."⁷⁷ The new narrative was supposed to concentrate on the masses. It was based on the historical role of progressive revolutionary movements (real or invented), class struggle, and the imagination of a genealogy for the Romanian-Soviet friendship across centuries. Roller's high-school textbook *Istoria RPR*, first published in September 1947, created a paradigm different from those extolled by previous histories. It relied on highly dogmatic interpretations of dialectical and historical materialism. Nevertheless, the patriotic flavor remained: "we aimed with this textbook to create a history of the people, of the motherland."⁷⁸

The creation of the Romanian People's Republic (30 December 1947) brought about significant changes in the conceptualization of postwar national renewal. On June 10-11, 1948 (just before Tito's condemnation by the Cominform), the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, the new name of the communists, inveighed against "the villainous theory of the so-called 'national unity', which wishes to replace the politics of class struggle with the politics of class collaboration."⁷⁹ The proclamation was an offspring of Stalin's pronouncement on the sharpening of class struggle during the advancement of socialism. This was a fundamental departure from the principles of popular democracy as they had been advocated between mid-1944 and the first half of 1947. It was the very opposite of the "popular front" policy that allowed for the overlap between intellectuals' discourses of national renewal and the party's practices of socialist transformation. The main cause of this momentous shift was the fact that "Stalin took the spheres of influence more seriously than he did anti-fascist democracy."⁸⁰ By 1947, it was obvi-

⁷⁷ Mihail Roller, *Probleme de istorie* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1947), 6.

⁷⁸ Mihail Roller, *Istoria RPR. Manual pentru învățământul mediu* (Bucharest: Editura de State Didactică și Pedagogică, 1952), v. Also see Andi Mihalache, *Istorie și practici discursive în România democrat-populară* (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 2003).

⁷⁹ "Rezoluția Plenarei a doua a Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român – 10-11 iunie 1948," ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cădere, dosar 90/1948, 6.

⁸⁰ Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 140.

ous to the USSR's leadership that popular democracy, as middle-way between the Soviet model and bourgeois democracy, could not sustain the social, political, and economic transformations envisaged both in the Kremlin and at the headquarters of East European communist parties. To make matters worse, the *cordon sanitaire*, so prominently mentioned in the meeting between intellectuals and Stalin's emissary to Bucharest Andrey Vishinsky, could not be achieved by way of national roads to socialism. In Stalin's view the line of separation from disruptive outside influences had to be much thicker. So, in September 1947, the Cominform was created. Less than a year later, after Tito's excommunication from the socialist camp, the Cominform was moved to Bucharest.

After 1948, intellectuals undoubtedly found it ever more difficult to define their role in the new regime. That year, more than ninety standing, associate, and honorary members were expelled from the Academy. They were deemed unfit for the new cultural orientations and hostile to the communist regime. The marginalization of the members of the section for historical, juridical, economic studies and philosophy was accomplished with the help of prominent academicians from the scientific sections.⁸¹ All segments of the society would be affected by widespread terror, an escalation of the targeted and limited repression and trials of the previous years.⁸² A wave of purges and arrests hit both those who were party members and those who were not. In November 1948, the RWP leadership initiated a massive campaign of verification among its ranks. By early 1950, 21.4 percent of the total membership was excluded from the party.⁸³

Intellectuals were the targets of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign and of the drive for vigilance that aimed to instill proletarian consciousness among "the former people." One of the defining moments in this push for ideological orthodoxy was the speech in 1949

⁸¹ Bogdan C. Iacob, "The Avatars of the Romanian Academy and the Historical Front," in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist regimes in East-Central Europe*, ed. by Vladimir Tismaneanu (New York/Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 255–81.

⁸² For a detailed analysis of the repression waves during the communist regime in Romania, and especially the late 1940s, see Tismaneanu et al., *Report Final*, 470–79, 493–504, 521–629.

⁸³ Cioflâncă and Radu, "Instalarea comunismului," 311–14.

by the party's chief ideologue Leonte Răutu entitled "Against Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism and Objectivism in the Social Sciences."⁸⁴ Earlier in the year, however, Răutu warned Agitprop county representatives of a potential "erroneous understanding of class struggle." He stated that "the majority of artists have a checkered past, but we must work with them if they convince us that they wish to come near us. We want to create our own new forces, but until then we must work with them. . . . We must have an elastic attitude. It is true: [those] who are even today class enemies must be beaten mercilessly. . . . But toward those people, with all the mistakes from their past, who want to draw closer [to us] . . . we must take care of them."⁸⁵ Even in his attack against bourgeois objectivism, Răutu insisted that "cosmopolitanism is the opposite of patriotism, its negation. Cosmopolitanism preaches total indifference toward the country's and the people's destinies."⁸⁶ While echoing the Stalinist autarchic mantra and Lenin's vision of cultural revolution, the party preserved its emphasis on socialist national belonging. By the mid-1950s, this particular form of socialist patriotism was reinvented along autochthonizing directions that between 1963 and 1964 will consolidate on the cultural front the RWP's break from Soviet tutelage.

Conclusion

In 2009, Alfred J. Rieber dwelled on the question of whether popular democracy was an illusion. He argued that it "was conceived as a possible alternative transition born of particular circumstances that combined Stalin's views of revolution, the experience of a near catastrophic anti-fascist war in an alliance with western liberal democracies and the dangers of incipient civil wars in the western borderlands of the Soviet Union." However, this middle ground between liberal democracy and a communist regime could not last. Breathtaking changes in domestic and international circumstances severely narrowed what Rieber called

⁸⁴ For the complete text, see Vladimir Tismaneanu and Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul Acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măștile răului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

⁸⁵ Quoted in Vasile, *Literatura și artele*, 282.

⁸⁶ Tismaneanu and Vasile, *Perfectul acrobat*, 221.

“the possibilities inherent in popular democracy.” In this context, “the concept was rendered illusory.”⁸⁷

My study of the role of the integrative ethos of socialist patriotic palingenesis and its binding effect in the relationship between intellectuals and the Romanian communist party validates Rieber’s answer. I would give it a twist though by arguing that popular democracy was a surprisingly enduring illusion because it marked the long-term development of the local regime. In the Romanian case (and a similar argument could be made for other countries), this illusion entrenched the fusion of socialist transformation (whichever way defined) with national interest. And, it identified intellectuals as central actors in the forging of the new Romanian socialist nation.

One can hardly ignore that the regime established after 1947/48 relied on a wholly restructured field of cultural and epistemic production that was administered by both the Party and “former people.” Undoubtedly, fellow-travelers, party members, reluctant legitimizers, *smenovekhovtsy*,⁸⁸ or opportunists took winding roads on the path of self-reformation and systemic reintegration. Between 1948 and 1953, times were harsh because the past weighed down heavily intellectuals’ trajectories within the regime. The level of reinvention required by the RWP was much higher than most of them ever anticipated. Starting with 1955, gradually, in a non-linear process, many of the actors involved in the debates about national rebirth through popular democracy will once again significantly impact the socialist transformation of the nation.

Because of lack of space, I will limit myself to only two examples. In 1958, Tudor Vianu became the general secretary of the Romanian

⁸⁷ Alfred J. Rieber, “Popular Democracy: An Illusion?” in Tismaneanu, ed., *Stalinism Revisited*, 104.

⁸⁸ I borrow this category from early Soviet history in order to describe nationalist intellectuals who accepted to work for the communist regime because they envisaged it as a valid incarnation of the nation-building principle. On *smenovekhovtsy*, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 9–15; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 35–38; or, Robert C. Williams, “Changing Landmarks in Russian Berlin, 1922–1924,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Dec. 1968): 581–93.

UNESCO commission. His activity in this body set the stage, in the early 1960s, for the rapprochement with the West. In 1962, he advocated that socialism reignited the 1920s generation's (of which he was a prominent representative) search for "a major style for Romanian culture." The new regime allowed intellectuals, "as representatives of the Romanian people," to make their voices heard internationally on "the problems of the world."⁸⁹

Between 1946 and 1947, Andrei Oțetea, tried to integrate Nicolae Iorga (the most famous, highly conservative Romanian historian, assassinated by the Iron Guard in 1940) in the epistemic Pantheon of popular democracy. In the later years, Oțetea had a sinuous trajectory within the regime's institutions. In 1948, he was elected associate member of the "reformed" Academy, but remained in Mihail Roller's shadow, as the latter dominated the historical front. Between 1955 and 1957, Oțetea played a central role in Roller's downfall. At the time he equally used *partiinost* and national themes to discredit his foe. He received the directorship of the Academy's Institute of History in Bucharest. In 1958, he was harshly criticized by Leonte Răutu for trying to rehabilitate pre-1945 historiographical themes and personalities. However, between 1960 and 1964, Oțetea was entrusted by the Central Committee to collect, edit, and publish *Marx's Notes on the Romanians*.⁹⁰ The volume essentially legitimized and popularized the party's criticism of Russian imperialism and implicitly of Soviet hegemony.⁹¹

⁸⁹ "Interview with Tudor Vianu," *Gazeta Literară*, 27 December 1962, 3. Historian Balázs Trencsényi remarked that Vianu's statements echoed ideas extolled by other prominent interwar intellectuals, who at the time of his interview had been to a large extent rehabilitated: archeologist V. Pârvan's "jump into universal culture, while avoiding 'denaturalization'"; or, philosopher Lucian Blaga's principle that "it is not the 'minor culture' that gives birth to the 'major culture', but both of them are the products of one and the same stylistic matrix." Balázs Trencsényi, *The Politics of 'National Character.' A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 47 and 49.

⁹⁰ *K. Marx. Însemnări despre români (manuscrit inedit)*, published by A. Oțetea and S. Scwann (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1964).

⁹¹ On the Romanian "historical front," Oțetea's biography, or Iorga's rehabilitation in the 1960s, see Bogdan C. Iacob, *Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation. History-Production in Communist Romania 1955–1966* (Ph.D. dissertation, CEU, 2011).

There are many such examples of intellectuals, who gained prominence before the end of World War II, embraced popular democracy between 1944 and 1947, survived the troubled waters of “high Stalinism” and emerged as important actors in the autochthonization of the regime in the late 1950s and the 1960s.⁹² The contribution of the former partisans of socialist patriotic palingenesis was essential because their activity in various party-state institutions, their writings and mentorship fundamentally altered the chemistry of past and present/tradition and revolution. Echoing the dynamics of the second half of the 1940s, this group inevitably affected the bases of continuity and discontinuity upon which socialism was built in Romania.

⁹² Maybe the most comprehensive analysis of intellectual trajectories from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s during communism is historian Cristian Vasile’s trilogy: *Literatura și artele în România comunistă 1948–1953* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), and *Viața intelectuală și artistică în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu, 1965–1974* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015).

Part Two

REVOLUTION
AND UTOPIA

PAUL HOLLANDER

*Dictators and Intellectuals:
Attractions and Affinities*

I.

There is considerable evidence indicating that many well-known twentieth-century intellectuals were admirers of dictators of different ideological persuasions. Such admiration, often merging into hero worship, was an integral part of their propensity to make staggering political misjudgments.¹ The admiration of dictators and dictatorships was inextricably linked: the attraction to individual dictators was inseparable from the appeals of the social-political system they created and dominated.² The phenomenon raises broader questions about poli-

¹ I am not proposing that all or most intellectuals admired dictators but only some, or a portion, of them. The same of course applies to their political misjudgments in general. I have written about their misjudgments of communist systems in Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). In the same study I also commented briefly on their reverential attitude toward communist dictators but this was not a major theme or preoccupation of the book. The subject matter of this essay was treated at far greater length and somewhat differently in Paul Hollander, *From Benito Mussolini to Hugo Chavez: Intellectuals and a Century of Political Hero Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

² There might have been exceptions. For instance, John P. Diggins believed that “whatever Americans may have thought of Fascism as an ideology, they viewed Mussolini as an outstanding leader whose achievements were the result of exceptional capacities of reason and will.” John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 70–71; see also p. 68. That is to say, for many Americans the appeals of Mussolini and the fascist political system he personified could be, and were, separated. Diggins might have agreed that this proposition applied to a lesser extent to intellectuals, more eager to embrace *both* the leader and the system.

tics and intellectuals, which cannot be answered in isolation from the various political, historical, and social-psychological phenomena of the same period.³ An examination of the relationship between intellectuals and dictators is likely to shed light on the nature of both groups as well as on the relationship between the powerful and powerless.

An important distinction has to be made between the attitudes of intellectuals who lived in the countries ruled by the dictators here discussed and those who observed them from a safe distance. Arguably, the favorable views of dictators taken by intellectuals who did not live in countries these autocrats dominated were more disinterested and idealistic, less contaminated by opportunistic motives—they had little to gain or lose by admiring them. By contrast, intellectuals who lived in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, the Soviet Union, or communist China were obligated, at any rate in their public behavior, to express unwavering support for their rulers. But it is also true that during the early history of these systems—especially in Germany and Italy—there was strong and genuine support for the dictators not only in the general population, but also among intellectuals that was not influenced by opportunistic motives.

Needless to say, intellectuals are not the only people capable of admiring dictators; many dictators have been hugely popular with the people they ruled, at any rate for certain periods of time. The popularity of dictators among the general, non-intellectual population is much easier to understand since dictators gratify the need for a father figure, a charismatic, paternalistic, self-assured incarnation of authority ready to make irresponsible and implausible promises and offer simple and sweeping solutions to a wide range of complex problems. The popularity of Donald Trump and his election as president is an instructive illustration of the intensity of such needs among certain stratas of the population, even in a well-established democratic society such as the

³ Joachim Fest wrote: “The weakness and readiness to capitulate [to modern dictatorships] can be understood only against a background of complex motivations connected with the whole position and function of intellectuals in modern society, which again and again explains the susceptibility of these classes to totalitarian solutions. Among these motivations are the ambivalent attitude of intellectuals to power and their tendency to embrace utopian systems or ideological concepts...” Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1970), 249.

American one. He has successfully appealed to portions of the population which feel deprived, frustrated, and resentful not necessarily, or primarily, for material-economic reasons but more on account of a perceived loss of status and respect. Like charismatic authority figures of the past (dealt with in this study) Trump conveys to his followers the nostalgia for an imaginary collective greatness of the past that translates into a craving for respect and a supportive national community. He has been especially skillful in providing his supporters with targets of blame and hatred, vilifying scapegoats, and validating grievances. His resentful audiences are especially appreciative of his uncompromising, authoritarian, punitive approach to problem-solving and his encouragement of their violent impulses. He also has in common with some of the dictators here examined an unshakable self-righteousness, an authoritarian temper and a coarse, violence-prone rhetoric. He resembles authoritarian, charismatic leaders of the past in lacking any discernible qualification, credential, or experience; his claims to authority and power rest solely on his groundless self-regard and egomaniacal sense of mission. The intense emotional support he received from the aggrieved segments of the population is a form of hero worship.

Dictators are justifiably considered personifications of repression, lawlessness and a seemingly insatiable hunger for power. Insofar as they attain legitimacy and popularity it is usually ascribed to their skills in deceiving their supporters, or the false consciousness of their subjects. The phenomenon compels reflection and further exploration because we do not expect intellectuals to sympathize with dictators, let alone admire them. We expect them to possess sound political and moral judgment. We think of them as an elite group, indeed, a moralizing elite, free of illusions and delusions and endowed with an enlarged capacity for distinguishing between right and wrong, as well as appearance and reality. Nor do we expect intellectuals to suspend the use of their critical faculties in certain situations, as for example, when they encounter and contemplate dictators surrounded by an orchestrated worship.

It is also widely assumed that intellectuals have a special interest in free expression and are fiercely committed to its defense—how could they function otherwise? If so, how could they admire and support dictators who invariably restrict free expression? A. James Gregor has also raised the question:

There is really no satisfactory answer to questions of why such individuals [i.e., intellectuals] remain loyal to political systems marred by moral failures. Why did not the Founding Fathers . . . withdraw their support when the system . . . institutionalized slavery—after they had all committed themselves to the moral conviction that “all men were created equal”? Why did not Nikolai Bukharin absent himself from the regime that had massacred untold numbers of innocents...? And what of all the Chinese intellectuals who continued to support Mao Zedong after the madness of the “Great Proletarian Revolution”? And what of the countless Western intellectuals who found so much to admire in Stalinism and Maoism even after their respective barbarisms became common knowledge? ⁴

Stanley Aronowitz, author of a book about C. Wright Mills, the leftist sociologist (for Aronowitz, the model of political or public intellectual), had high expectations of such intellectuals and entertained an idealized image of this group. According to him, “the political intellectual, an endangered species throughout modern history, assumed the role of tribune: his mission was to expose the distortions, half-truths, and outright lies that were the steady diet offered by official propaganda.”⁵ Aronowitz did not seem to be concerned with the attitude of these political intellectuals (i.e., those on the left) toward the “official propaganda” of countries ruled by radical leftist dictators. He would have found it difficult to assert that the same political intellectuals ready to denounce the misrepresentations and defects prevalent in their own (Western) societies were similarly disposed to probe and denounce the falsehoods emanating from such dictatorships. In this largely admiring intellectual biography of Mills, Aronowitz offered a qualified defense of his serious misjudgements of Castro.⁶

⁴ A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 2001), 99.

⁵ Stanley Aronowitz, *Taking It Big: C. Wright Mills and the Making of Political Intellectuals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 190.

⁶ While harboring some reservations about Castro’s Cuba, Aronowitz revealed his own ignorance asserting that in Cuba “citizens remain armed” (*ibid.*, 210) and that the so-called neighborhood committees for the defense of the revolution provided opportunities for the criticism of the authorities (*ibid.*, 211). In fact, the major function of these committees was grassroots super-

This essay seeks to answer the following questions: Was the admiration of dictators by intellectuals similar or different from the admiration of ordinary people, of non-intellectuals? Do intellectuals admire dictators because of their personality, their ideas, or the political system they preside over? What particular attributes of dictators do intellectuals find the most appealing? How do intellectuals justify their admiration of dictators in light of the dissonance between such admiration and their supposed commitment to free expression and political freedom? How can we explain these attitudes? Do larger cultural-political trends account for them? Or, do these attitudes originate in the very nature of intellectuals, in their shared attributes that may include ambivalence about their own social role, their identity problems, and the unease about being thinkers and talkers rather than doers?⁷ Do intellectuals have in common certain personality traits? What is it in the nature of intellectuals, especially public (or political) intellectuals, that makes them susceptible to the appeal of dictators and the political systems they represent?

Intellectuals may be thought of as highly educated professional moralizers and social critics. Since the second half of the twentieth century they have been increasingly concentrated in academic institutions, in the humanities and social sciences. As a rule, they are not highly specialized and instead are preoccupied with large cultural, social, and political ideas and questions. They are idealistic and consequently chronically dissatisfied with their own society, or the world as a whole. It is likely that the political disposition of many Western intel-

vision, control, and spying. As to armed citizens, only those whose loyalty to the system was beyond the slightest doubt were armed. Aronowitz also wrote that communist Cuba "is an instance . . . of intellectuals in power" (ibid., 212) thereby suggesting that intellectuals can retain their unique social role and qualifications while serving a repressive system. But on the next page he writes that Mills believed (and he agrees) that "intellectuals are the conscience of society, eternal critics [who] . . . only under exceptional circumstances should allow themselves to become functionaries of any system." (Ibid., 213.) Apparently Mills and Aronowitz believed that such exceptional circumstances existed in Castro's Cuba.

⁷ For a more recent analysis of the shared attributes of intellectuals, their identity problems, and especially, their hostility to commerce and capitalism, see Alan S. Kahan, *Mind vs. Money: The War between Intellectuals and Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers), 2010.

lectuals is further influenced by their uncertain social status and corresponding identity problems, also reflected in their alternating embrace of elitism and egalitarianism. Many of them used to believe that these identity problems would be resolved in the totalitarian dictatorships they idealized: they would become well integrated, no longer isolated from the masses, taken seriously, and assured of their social-cultural functions by the philosopher king dictator they revered.

Further questions remain about the sources of the apparent (if often transient) affinity between intellectuals and dictators. Is it the ideals and the nature of the political systems these dictators represented, or their charisma (if any), or the possession of vast amounts of power that appealed to these intellectuals? Do intellectuals totally or only partially misperceive the dictators they admire, and if so, what attributes do they project upon them? Did dictators of different political persuasion have the same appeal? Did intellectuals become attracted to certain political systems because they were impressed by the personality of the dictators who were in charge of them? Or, to the contrary, was it the nature of these systems that impressed them in the first place and led them to the admiration of their founders and leaders, the dictators? Did the admiration of dictators by intellectuals have any practical consequences, helping to legitimate them and the political system they dominated?⁸

The dictatorships which appealed to many twentieth-century Western intellectuals were not ordinary authoritarian regimes but, as a rule, ideocratic, totalitarian systems which proclaimed commitment to secular religious beliefs and the sweeping transformation of social institutions and even human nature. Dictators of more circumscribed aspirations and more limited power, such as Franco, Salazar, Piłsudski, Chang Kai Sheik, Perón, or Somoza did not exercise the same attraction. Omar Torrijos of Panama, by no means a major historical figure, and one without consuming ideological commitments, was an interest-

⁸ For example, it has been suggested that Walter Duranty's totally wrongheaded, adulatory views of Stalin and the Soviet system exerted "great influence in shaping American attitudes toward the Soviet Union" and even helped to persuade Roosevelt to open diplomatic relations with it. Francine de Plessix Gray, "The Journalist and the Dictator," *New York Times Book Review*, June 24, 1990.

ing exception who nonetheless stimulated the admiration and friendship of Graham Greene.⁹

The late Eric Hobsbawm, the widely revered British historian, provides a striking example of the overwhelming importance of the professed ideals of a political system stimulating the durable admiration of many intellectuals. In 1994, he was asked in an interview if he would have supported the Soviet system had he known of its mass murders of the 1930s. He responded, after some apparent hesitation, that he would have done so, because of “the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing.”¹⁰ The common foundation of the favorable attitudes toward Fascism and Nazism, on the one hand, and Communism, on the other, was a profound alienation from Western societies which predisposed many intellectuals to a hopeful, benefit-of-the-doubt-giving attitude toward systems which claimed to offer thrilling, radical alternatives and preferably, revolutionary change.¹¹ Alastair Hamilton suggested that “the barrier between those who chose Communism and those who preferred Fascism seems to me, in many cases, so slim that we are less than ever entitled to say that a certain type of man, a certain type of psychology tended toward Fascism.”¹²

Another important commonality of the attitudes here sketched was an inclination to hero worship, a compensatory disposition stimulated by aspects of modernity, which reduced the possibilities for heroic self-assertion some intellectuals aspired to. As Robert Nisbet observed, there has been a “retreat of the heroic from the life of Western societies . . . between heroism and modernity there has been a fateful conflict.

⁹ See Graham Greene, *Getting to Know the General. The Story of an Involvement* (New York: The Book Club Associates, 1984). Greene also admired other (communist) authoritarian systems such as the Soviet Union, Castro's Cuba, and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas but only with Torrijos did he have an intimate personal relationship. García Márquez was another friend of Torrijos, who was “a faithful reader” of his books. Enrique Krauze, “In the Shadow of the Patriarch,” *New Republic*, November 4, 2009, 45.

¹⁰ Quoted in Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 10–11.

¹¹ See Raymond Aron, *The Opium of Intellectuals* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1957).

¹² Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals 1919–1945* (London: Blond 1971), XVI.

The acids of modernity, which include egalitarianism, [and] skepticism . . . have eaten away much of the base on which heroism flourished.” Hans Speier too pointed to a connection between the decline of the heroic elements of life and modernity: “There is sharp contrast between heroic society and modern social organization. Power now is centralized and largely anonymous; law has restrained self-reliance. . . . A truly bewildering specialization of work has created a web of interdependence. . . . We are divorced from the naive and full assertion of life. . . .”¹³ Speier further suggested that while in modern societies externally imposed risks have multiplied, opportunities for freely chosen risk—associated with heroism—diminished. Vicarious identification with seemingly heroic dictators satisfied these unmet needs both among ordinary people and intellectuals seeking opportunities for idealistic self-assertion. While intellectuals for the most part were not inclined to take violent actions, some of them admired the strong men who did not hesitate to resort to violence in pursuit of laudable objectives.¹⁴ In the following I will examine the attitudes of some well-known Western intellectuals towards dictators such as Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and Hugo Chávez in the hope that the emerging patterns will provide some answers the questions raised earlier.

II.

It needs to be pointed out at the outset that the attraction of Western intellectuals to right-wing dictators and dictatorships was less widespread and less durable than similar attitudes toward communist

¹³ Robert Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 102, 109, and Hans Speier, “Risk, Security and Modern Hero Worship,” in *Social Order and Risks of War. Papers in Political Sociology* (New York: G.W. Stewart, 1952), 125, 126.

¹⁴ There have been numerous exceptions. One was the largely unknown involvement of various intellectuals in assassinations organized by the NKVD in the 1930s documented by John Dziak among others. See Stephen Schwartz, “Intellectuals an Assassins: Annals of Stalin’s Killerati,” *New York Times Book Review*, January 24, 1988. Further examples of such involvement include the murderous Shining Path guerilla movement in Peru that “was headed and founded by professors” and the violent Red Brigades of Italy that enjoyed similar support among academics. Conquest, *Reflections*, 220.

dictators and their political systems. Even so, Stephen Spender could correctly observe half a century ago that “some of the greatest modern writers sympathized with Fascism . . . [because it] offered political answers to criticisms of modern technological society made by the cultured and the lovers of past civilization.”¹⁵ Moreover, “fascism was not perceived in the 1920s as the face of evil—neither by the man in the street, by the media, or by the leaders of democratic nations.”¹⁶ Malcolm Muggeridge also reminds us that

As many adhering to the Left journeyed to the USSR, there to offer thanks and admire all that they were shown, so did their corresponding type of the Right make Hitler their hero and the Third Reich their paradise. If the Rev. Hewlett Johnson detected in the Soviet regime the highest extant realization of Christian principles, Major Yeats-Brown made the more guarded statement that it was his “honest conviction that there is more real Christianity in Germany today than there ever was under the Weimar Republic. . . .” Corresponding to the ladies who met Russians whose eyes glowed proudly when Stalin’s name was mentioned, were other ladies who had met Germans whose eyes similarly glowed when Hitler’s name was mentioned . . . against Lord Passfield [Sidney Webb] reverent in Moscow, might be set Lord Rothermere reverent in Munich.¹⁷

As will be shown later, ambivalence about, or disappointment with, modernity contributed not only to the appeal of Fascism and Nazism, but to communist systems as well. Western intellectuals were especially disheartened by the decline of community—a major by-product of modernity. Many of them came to believe that communist systems succeeded in modernizing without the adverse side-effects of modernity and proved capable of ushering in new, and superior forms of community.¹⁸

¹⁵ Stephen Spender, “Foreword” in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, X.

¹⁶ Leon Surette, *Dreams of Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 97.

¹⁷ Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Sun Never Sets: The Story of England in the Nineteen Thirties* (New York: Random House, 1940), 281–82.

¹⁸ Beliefs in the superior forms of modernization unaccompanied by alienation and attributed to communist systems are further examined by Peter L. Berger in “The Socialist Myth,” *Public Interest* (Summer 1976): 5–11.

Several circumstances explain why the appeals of Fascism and Nazism and their leaders were more limited and less durable than those of communist systems and their leaders. World War II made it difficult for Western intellectuals so disposed to continue sympathizing with regimes which were at war with their own countries. Moreover, these systems were destroyed during the war and left nothing behind to idealize. Information about the massive atrocities committed by these regimes, especially Nazi Germany,¹⁹ made it particularly difficult to cling to an idealized image of these systems and their leaders. But probably the most important reason for the different attitudes of Western intellectuals toward these systems was that neither Nazism nor Italian Fascism offered the kind of inspiring and universalistic ideology Marxism appeared to be. Communist systems and their leaders made good use of the attractions of Marxism to legitimate themselves. To be sure, distinctions are in order between Nazism and Italian Fascism, as A. James Gregor in particular pointed out.²⁰ Nonetheless, all these systems and their supporting ideologies had in common a pervasive collectivism that appealed to many Western intellectuals ambivalent about their own individualism, social role and concerned with the decline of community in their society.

Curzio Malaparte, the Italian writer-journalist (who later abandoned his fascist sympathies) aptly summed up the appeals of fascism

¹⁹ The atrocities committed by fascist Italy were far more limited. Probably the major and best-known case was the brutal invasion of Ethiopia.

²⁰ Gregor argued that the ideas and ideology of Fascism has been largely misunderstood in the Western world and that they had far less in common with Nazism than has been generally believed. He wrote: "there remains a residue of opinion that continues to deny Fascism the same reasoned beliefs that everyone readily grants to the political movements and systems of Joseph Stalin or Mao Zedong. . . . It early became commonplace to attribute to Fascism a unique irrationality, accompanied by a ready recourse to violence. . . ." Important differences between the two ideologies and political systems included a far less virulent racism and antisemitism in the fascist case and an absence of biological determinism that was central to Nazism. Gregor also noted that fascism never provided rationale for the mass murder of Jews, see his *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), IX, 1, 4, 226, 258, and that there were considerable differences between the treatment of intellectuals in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, the latter being far less repressive. See Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile*, 67–68.

for many intellectuals: "The Fascist revolution (is) a whole process of revision of the present civil, cultural, political and spiritual values. [It is] A radical and objective criticism of . . . everything modern . . . the final goal of the Fascist revolution is the restoration of our natural and historical civilization which has been degraded by the triumphant rise of the barbarism of modern life."²¹ A similar observation about Mussolini could be generalized to account for the appeal of *all dictators* here considered: "Mussolini's dominant image was . . . that of the redeemer. He and his men represented all that was healthy and redemptive in Italian life."²² John Diggins pointed out that "of the many splendid images which Mussolini enjoyed in America none received greater attention from intellectuals than his pose as the pragmatic statesman. . ." Correspondingly, "Fascism's appeal to the liberals . . . was found in its experimental nature, anti-dogmatic temper, and moral élan."²³

But different intellectuals found, or rather, projected, different virtues or traits upon him. According to Irving Babbitt, Mussolini's "puritanical will may be needed to save us from the American equivalent of Lenin," whereas "Santayana saw in Fascism a higher organic Italian culture. . . ." Among the smaller number of Western intellectuals who (for a while) admired *both* fascism and communism, Lincoln Steffens "believed that Mussolini's charismatic dictatorship of the Right could lead to a new realistic path to the goals of the Left."²⁴ Likewise, Wyndham Lewis "was not alone in admiring Mussolini's fascism, but he was eccentric in his endorsement of *both* fascism and Soviet communism." Leon Surette further argued that both fascism/Nazism and communism represented themselves as revolutionary, and both claimed to represent the common man against the interests of commerce and industry: "Agreeing with the socialists that the status quo is not supportable. . . . Lewis's solution . . . was benevolent tyranny, as exemplified by Lenin's rule in the Soviet Union and Mussolini's in Italy."²⁵ In 1935, Wallace Stevens admitted to being pro-Mussolini and even supported the Italian invasion of Ethiopia: "The Italians have as much right to take

²¹ Quoted in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 53.

²² Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 211, 231.

²⁴ Cited in Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 209, 210, 224.

²⁵ Quoted in Surette, *Dreams of Totalitarian Utopia*, 146, 100, 156.

Ethiopia from the coons . . . as the coons had to take it from the boa-constrictors.”²⁶ Initially, Oswald Spengler, the famous German historian also had a favorable impression of fascist Italy and Mussolini in particular. He even sent the dictator five of his books in 1925.²⁷

The poet Ezra Pound was probably the most fervent and deeply committed foreign admirer of Mussolini. He moved to Italy in 1924 and during World War II was a propagandist for the regime making radio broadcasts. He considered Mussolini and the system he created vastly superior to the decadent Western societies and their leaders. Although far from being a Marxist, Pound detested capitalism and believed that fascist Italy will purify Europe of the corruptions of capitalism. He averred that Fascist Italy was the only country capable of “opposing . . . the infinite evil of the profiteers and the sellers of men’s blood for money.”²⁸ It was also his peculiar conviction that Mussolini had much in common with Thomas Jefferson and continued “the task of Thomas Jefferson.”²⁹ Pound further asserted that “the heritage of Jefferson, Quincy Adams, old John Adams . . . is HERE, NOW in the Italian Peninsula . . . not in Massachusetts or Delaware.”³⁰ His strange worldview also found expression in the belief that World War II “was not caused by any caprice on Mussolini’s part, nor on Hitler’s. This war is part of the secular war between usurers and peasants, between usurocracy and whoever does an honest day’s work with his own brain or hands.”³¹

For Pound, the attractions of Mussolini and Fascism were inseparable: “The first act of *fascio* was to save Italy from people too stupid to govern. . . . The second act was to free it from parliamentarians . . . from groups too politically immoral to govern.” Rather implausibly he averred that “neither Lenin nor Mussolini show themselves primarily as men thirsting for power.” His faith in Mussolini was boundless: “Mussolini’s miracle had been that of awakening the sense of responsibility. . . . By taking more responsibility than any other man (save pos-

²⁶ Quoted in Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 245.

²⁷ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 116–17.

²⁸ Ezra Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini. L’Idea Statale. Fascism as I have seen it* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935), 61.

²⁹ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 288.

³⁰ Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, 12

³¹ Quoted in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 289.

sibly Lenin) . . . Mussolini has succeeded in imparting . . . this sense to others.”³² Evidently Pound also admired and respected Lenin.

British intellectuals who admired Mussolini, (or “had shown a positive interest in the Italian experiment”) included Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Hilaire Belloc.³³ Alastair Hamilton suggested that “Belloc and Gilbert Chesterton . . . believed in a more equal distribution of wealth which they thought the Jews were obstructing and Mussolini was on the way to attaining.” William Butler Yeats while rejecting Marxism was attracted to fascism and admired Giovanni Gentile, its major intellectual supporter.³⁴ George Bernard Shaw was one of the Western intellectuals who admired *both* Mussolini and Lenin, as well as Stalin, and the political systems each created. Hamilton wrote about Shaw that “after sending Lenin his latest book with a flattering dedication in 1921, he praised ‘the inspired precision’ with which Mussolini ‘denounced liberty as a putrefying corpse’. . . . To condemn Mussolini for the assassination of Matteotti was absurd, according to Shaw, for many great statesmen were forced . . . to murder inconvenient opponents.”³⁵

Shaw exemplifies the Western intellectual whose political sympathies were predetermined by the visceral rejection of his own society. He was consequently drawn to political movements or systems which shared his hatred of it. He was convinced that both Mussolini’s Italy and Lenin’s and Stalin’s Soviet Union represented rejuvenation and all-round progress. At last, Shaw personifies the stunning contradiction characteristic of the attitude of many Western intellectuals here discussed, between merciless criticism routinely aimed at their own society and an embarrassing credulousness toward the claims of those they idealized, in this case the Soviet Union. It never occurred to this great cynic that the conducted tour he took in the Soviet Union might not have been the best source of reliable information about that country and its government.³⁶

³² Pound, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, 94, 99, 39.

³³ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 257, 258.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 270, 278.

³⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 271.

³⁶ Shaw was among the most gullible of the political pilgrims I dealt with in the book of the same title, Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 102–76 (see, esp., Chapter 4).

It is not surprising that Mussolini had more supporters among Italian intellectuals than among those of other countries, especially before he became an ally of Hitler. In March 1925, a congress of fascist intellectuals in Bologna concluded with a manifesto (drafted by Gentile) that gave full support to Mussolini's policies. The document stressed "the vitality of Fascism and exalt[ed] the Italian nation." It was signed by the major figures of the period.³⁷ Benedetto Croce (who later became an opponent of the Fascist regime) averred, at one point, that "I consider so excellent the cure to which Fascism has submitted Italy that my main worry is that the convalescent may leave her bed too soon and suffer a serious relapse."³⁸ Even towards the end of the war when the fortunes of the Axis powers were in steep decline "those traditionally considered 'intellectuals'—the scholars, literary figures, artists and journalists—made themselves available" to Mussolini to assist him in recreating the fascist regime in Northern Italy.³⁹

Luigi Pirandello, the famous playwright, was "one of the many intellectuals to be seduced by Mussolini's charm. The Duce knew the art of telling his visitors exactly what they wanted to hear . . . [he] knew how to flatter artists. When Ezra Pound met him in 1933 he found a copy of his *Cantos* lying on Mussolini's desk. . . ." ⁴⁰ It was a technique also extensively used in communist countries. Pirandello believed that Mussolini had a special affinity with artists and art: "I have always had the greatest admiration for Mussolini and I think I am one of the few people capable of understanding the beauty of this continuous creation of reality performed by him. . . . Mussolini is one of the few people who knows that reality only exists in man's power to create it."⁴¹ Pirandello also claimed to believe that Mussolini "had solved the antinomy between life and form."⁴²

Pirandello was far from the only intellectual or artist who thought that the dictator he admired was a "philosopher king" bursting with artistic impulses and talents. In turn, several of these dictators did har-

³⁷ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 56–57.

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 44.

³⁹ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 227.

⁴⁰ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 46.

⁴¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 46–47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 47.

bor artistic ambitions and self-conceptions which further encouraged these perceptions. Hitler aspired to be a painter in his youth. Mussolini was an “accomplished” violinist and wrote a play⁴³ and Mao wrote poems. In addition, all these dictators have written copiously about weighty social and political matters and their writings were designated, in the countries they ruled, as an essential part of the doctrinal foundation of these systems. They were often perceived by the intellectuals attracted to them as fellow intellectuals of superior qualities and accomplishments who transcended the gulf between talk and action, theory and practice. John Gunther, an American journalist, proposed that Mussolini was “the only modern ruler who can genuinely be termed an intellectual.”⁴⁴ Attributions of towering intellect were more frequent in the case of the communist dictators as will be seen later.

Gabriele d’Annunzio, the politically active Italian poet, was among the admirers of Mussolini and congratulated him for invading Ethiopia. As did Pirandello, who called him “The Author of his great feat [i.e., the invasion]. . . . A true man of the theatre, a providential hero whom God granted Italy at the right moment. . . .”⁴⁵

Gentile was the most committed and influential supporter of Mussolini and Fascism and the most highly appreciated intellectual by Mussolini who “had unequivocally committed himself to the Gentilean notion of the totalitarian state in which ‘everything [was] in the state, nothing outside the state, and nothing against the state.’”⁴⁶ This idea was very similar to Fidel Castro’s proposition that everything was permissible within the Revolution, but nothing outside of it. As Gregor observed, “for Gentile, the concept of human being as ‘communal’ creatures always remained central to his moral and political doctrine. The moral injunction to fully realize oneself . . . could be achieved only in community—within the state. . . .”⁴⁷ Gentile was appointed minister of education by Mussolini in 1923.

⁴³ See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 241, 242. As another author put it, “Mussolini was Romanticisms’s godlike ‘artist-creator’ transposed from the sphere of the arts to the arena of politics.” Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult. A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 12.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 61–62.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 69.

⁴⁶ Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile*, 63.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

It was the other major appeal of fascism that it sought to, and succeeded to, gratify nationalistic longings: "For Gentile, and for the intellectuals who initially committed themselves to Fascism, Mussolini and his movement embodied Italy's effort to find its place in the sun in a world environment in which all the advanced industrial powers had already established themselves."⁴⁸ It was an aspiration that was very similar to that of communist states such as the USSR and China, which wished to "catch up with" and "overtake" Western capitalist countries. Gentile saw in Fascism the "true realization of . . . thought and action."⁴⁹ Arguably, this was its major appeal for intellectuals. It was very similar to the appeal of the (alleged) unity of theory and practice in the policies and objectives of communist movements and systems.

III.

Among German intellectuals, including academics, there was significant support for Nazism and its creator and supreme leader, Hitler. For example, "as early as 1924 . . . two Noble Prize winners, Philip Lenard and Johannes Stark, were among the signatories of a newspaper appeal in support of Hitler, who, they said . . . appear to us like God's gifts out of time that has long passed in which races still were purer, men still greater, minds less deceived."⁵⁰ Max Weinreich observed that the Nazis set out with a comparatively small number of outsiders but soon were joined by mounting numbers of people of regular academic standing, some of them scholars of note. As time progressed, the bulk of university scholars, scholarly periodicals, and publishing houses was entirely "Nazified."⁵¹

Historian Joachim Fest provides further illustration of the same trend: "As early as March 3 [1933] three hundred university teachers of all political persuasions declared themselves for Hitler in an election appeal, while the mass of students had gone over to the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁹ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 58.

⁵⁰ "Foreword" by Martin Gilbert to Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), V-VI.

⁵¹ Ibid., 240.

National Socialist camp considerably earlier. As early as 1931 the [National Socialist] party, with 50 to 60 per cent of the votes enjoyed almost twice as much support in the universities as in the country as a whole.”⁵² Fest not only documents the German intellectuals’ support for Nazism, he holds them responsible for lending legitimacy to the regime: “The guilt of intellectual radicalism in helping to bring about National Socialism lies in the way it prepared public opinion for the regime’s excessive claims in all fields, in its expulsion of reason, its devaluation of the image of man . . . its consistent denunciation of all ethical principles . . . presented under the guise of a fresh, undismayed, undeluded feeling for life.”⁵³

In the same spirit, Wilhelm Röpke, the German economist and critic of Nazism, wrote that “there is scarcely another class in Germany that failed so fatally as that of the intellectuals” in resisting Nazism, and that “the faculties of social science provided a special opportunity for practicing intellectual treachery and preparing the way for Nazism.”⁵⁴ Oswald Spengler, despite his reservations about Hitler, could not find anyone else to vote for in 1932 and subsequently had an interview with him. Ernst Jünger, the prominent writer, sent “dedicated copies of his war books” to Hitler. In his turn, Hitler sent him *Mein Kampf* and offered him in 1927 a National Socialist seat in the parliament that Jünger refused to accept.⁵⁵

Martin Heidegger was another prominent sympathizer with Hitler and credited him with “the clear wish to be unconditionally responsible for assuming the mastery of the destiny of our people.” He joined the Nazi Party and accepted appointment as rector of Freiburg University. Benedetto Croce compared Heidegger’s political disposition to that of Gentile although his support of Nazism was far less durable than Gentile’s comparable attitude toward Italian fascism. Heidegger left the Nazi party in 1934. Earlier, Heidegger was especially enthusiastic about the Nazi Labor Service, which enlisted students for manual

⁵² Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 252.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 261–62.

⁵⁴ Wilhelm Röpke, “National Socialism and Intellectuals,” quoted in George B. de Huszar, ed., *The Intellectuals. A Controversial Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 346, 348.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 142, 154, 123.

labor a few months each year and “brought them into contact with workers and peasants.” He “encouraged his students to volunteer, convinced that the Labor Service would produce a ‘new man,’ the intellectual laborer.” He wrote: “In the Labor Camps there is a new reality. . . Camps and schools intend to gather . . . the educational powers of our people in order to obtain that new unity in which the nation will drive towards its destiny under the State.” According to Hamilton, Heidegger believed that under Nazism the social roles and ways of life of the warrior, worker, and intellectual would merge.⁵⁶

Similar ideas—including those of the new politicized renaissance man who transcends the old division of labor—were held by the ideologues of communist systems. They too introduced programs designed to expose students (sometimes office workers as well) to manual labor especially in China under Mao and in Cuba under Fidel Castro. Communist ideologues also believed that contact between students and manual workers was an important source of political enlightenment and rectitude. The Marxist-Leninist veneration of manual labor, and belief in its redeeming qualities (or the pretense thereof), was associated with the doctrinal veneration of the proletariat that was absent from Nazi ideology.

The Western intellectuals’ apparent reverence for what might be called politically correct manual labor probably had other sources as well, such as an ambivalence about their own identity, lack of engagement with productive labor and possibly a lingering unease about the authenticity of their own political commitments and way of life. It is of interest to note here that totalitarian ideologues and dictators had serious reservations, and sometimes outright contempt toward intellectuals.⁵⁷ The latter (especially in the West) seemed unaware of these atti-

⁵⁶ Heidegger quoted in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 146.

⁵⁷ Hitler was said to harbor a “rancor against the ‘intellectual classes’” and in a speech in 1938 said “‘Unfortunately we need them [i.e. the intellectuals]; otherwise we might one day . . . exterminate them. . . . But unfortunately we need them.’” Quoted in Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, 259. Lenin’s contempt, or what Adam Ulam calls his “pathological dislike” of intellectuals might have been even more deeper. Ulam wrote: “his hatred of the intelligentsia . . . runs like a thread through his personal and public life, and provides much if not most of the emotional intensity behind the revolutionary strivings.” At the same time “Lenin never forgot that the hated

tudes and preferred to believe that in these societies (and especially the communist ones) intellectuals were well-integrated, enjoyed important social-political roles and recognition, and attained a new sense of identity. Alan Kahan wrote: "It is striking how much abuse intellectuals are willing to accept, and even to inflict upon themselves, while serving the anti-capitalist movement of their choice."⁵⁸

For understandable reasons, the admiration of Hitler and Nazism among Western intellectuals (outside Germany) was far less widespread and more short-lived. Nonetheless even Hitler was, for a time, viewed favorably by some Western intellectuals disenchanted with their own society and therefore reluctant to criticize others.⁵⁹ One of them was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, an English philosopher and admirer of German culture (he took German citizenship), who met Hitler in 1923 well before his rise to power. He wrote in a letter to Hitler: "You are not as you were described . . . you are not a fanatic. . . . Your eyes . . . capture people and hold them in their grip. . . . And your hands are so expressive . . . that they compete with your eyes. Such a man can administer peace to a poor tortured soul. My belief in Germany never wavered but I must confess that my hopes were at a low ebb. You have transformed my state of mind with one stroke."⁶⁰

Another remarkable instance of admiration for Nazism and Hitler was displayed by the prolific and popular British novelist and nature lover, Henry Williamson (1895–1977). In his case there seemed to be a connection between his love of nature, and farming and the strongly felt but mistaken idea that Nazi Germany ushered in a return to a more authentic and natural way of life. Reporting of his 1935 visit to Germany he wrote: "No beggars in the street: there was work of a kind available to any who applied for it. . . . Everywhere I saw faces that

intelligentsia were still the key to the success of the revolutionary, or of any political movement in Russia." The latter realization closely resembled Hitler's disposition. Adam Ulam: *Lenin and the Bolsheviks* (London: Fontana, 1965), 148, 210, 213, 210, 213.

⁵⁸ Kahan, *Mind vs. Money*, 181.

⁵⁹ For example, T.S. Eliot argued that "We cannot condemn Nazi tyranny, brutality and paganism . . . because our own society is also infected with tyranny, brutality and paganism." Quoted by Surette, *Dreams of Totalitarian Utopia*, 251.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism*, 109.

looked to be breathing extra oxygen; people free from mental fear. . . . Hitler had freed the farmers from the mortgages . . . cleared the slums, inspired work for all the seven million unemployed . . . the former pallid leer of hopeless slum youth transformed into sun-tan, the clear eye, the broad and easy rhythm of the poised young human being.”⁶¹ Strikingly similar sentiments had been expressed by favorably disposed visitors to the Soviet Union often using identical metaphors about people breathing more freely under the blissful conditions created by the Soviet system. Williamson’s grotesque misperceptions included the conviction that Hitler was “the only true pacifist in Europe.”⁶²

Wyndham Lewis, who sympathized with Italian fascism, was also impressed by Nazi Germany—at any rate in its earlier incarnation. Following his visit to Germany in 1930, he too showed a stellar capacity for wishful misperceptions. He wrote, among other things, that “if Hitler had his way . . . he would, I am positive, remain peacefully at home, fully occupied with the internal problems of the *Dritte Reich*. And as regards . . . the vexed question of the ‘anti-Semitic’ policy of his party . . . I believe that Hitler himself—once he obtained power—would show increasing moderation and tolerance.”⁶³

Knut Hamsun, the Norwegian Noble Prize-winning writer, was another unwavering devotee of Hitler. Throughout World War II he was a vocal supporter of Nazi Germany. He met Hitler and gave as a gift to Goebbels his Noble Prize Medal. In May 1945, he wrote the following obituary of Hitler published in a Norwegian newspaper: “I am not worthy to speak for Adolf Hitler... Hitler was a warrior, a warrior for humankind and a preacher of the gospel of justice for all nations. He was a reforming character of the highest order, and his historical fate was that he functioned in a time of exampleless [unequalled] brutality, which in the end felled him. Thus may the ordinary Western European look at Adolf Hitler. And we, his close followers, bow our heads at his death.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 266.

⁶² Quoted in *ibid.*, 267.

⁶³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Walter Gibbs, “Norwegian Nobel Laureate Once Shunned Is Now Celebrated,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2009.

While Italian fascism and nazism were in many ways different ideologies and political systems presided over by leaders of dissimilar personalities and agendas, their appeals and attractions for Western intellectuals were strikingly comparable.⁶⁵ None of these dictators and dictatorships were perceived dictatorial by their supporters but embodiments of the popular will. Both Mussolini and Hitler were seen by their intellectual followers as exceptionally powerful and charismatic leaders who used their power wisely and selflessly for the benefit of their people. Their charisma was reflected in their capacity to mobilize the masses and inspire their unconditional loyalty and support. Both Mussolini and Hitler were believed to be capable of bringing about major and highly desirable social transformations, overcoming stagnation, corruption, and decadence associated with capitalism and modernity. Equally important was the belief that they were “redeemers”—men of strong beliefs able to infuse life with meaning in increasingly secular societies.

IV.

Two general propositions may explain the *durable* attraction of communist dictators among many Western intellectuals.⁶⁶ The first is that they were ignorant of the personalities, policies, and intentions of the dictators in question. The second is that these intellectuals possessed a remarkable capacity for projection, that is to say, for attributing qualities they valued highly to individuals they were disposed to admire.

One of the grotesque misconceptions about Stalin was that he had little interest in power. Emil Ludwig, the German writer, upon visiting Stalin, “found a lonely man who is not influenced by money or

⁶⁵ For a recent examination of the similarities and differences between fascism, Nazism, and communist totalitarianism, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁶⁶ As noted earlier, we may need a different explanation for the durable affection of non-intellectuals and especially of the people these dictators ruled. For instance, in postcommunist Russia there remains a good deal of nostalgia and a reservoir of affection for Stalin associated with the superpower status of the former Soviet Union, a militant patriotism, and the stability and modest security the Soviet system seemed to guarantee to ordinary people.

pleasure or even ambition. Though he holds enormous power he takes no pride in its possession. . . . I found myself . . . face to face with a dictator to whose care I would readily confide the education of my children." Lion Feuchtwanger, another well-known German writer of the period, considered Stalin "the most unpretentious" of all the men known to him who held power. W.E.B. Du Bois believed that "he [Stalin] asked for neither adulation, nor vengeance. He was reasonable and conciliatory." Sidney and Beatrice Webb wrote that "Stalin is not a dictator . . . , he is the duly elected representative of one of the Moscow constituencies to the Supreme Soviet . . . [he] has persistently asserted . . . that as a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR he is merely a colleague of thirty other members. . . ." ⁶⁷

The Webbs were also impressed by what they saw as Stalin's caring attitude: "As Stalin said 'man must be grown carefully and attentively as a gardener grows his favorite fruit tree.'" ⁶⁸ Jerome Davis, professor at Yale Divinity School reached the conclusion that "it would be an error to consider the Soviet leader [Stalin] a willful man who believes in forcing his ideas upon others." ⁶⁹ J.D. Bernal, the British scientist, averred that Stalin "combined as no man had before his time, a deep theoretical understanding with unfailing mastery of practice . . . [and] a deeply scientific approach to all problems with his capacity for feeling. . . ." ⁷⁰ In Pablo Neruda's estimation, Stalin was "a good natured man of principles, as sober as a hermit, a titanic defender of the Russian Revolution . . . [who] had become a giant in wartime." ⁷¹ George Bernard Shaw's admiration of Stalin was an integral part of

⁶⁷ Emil Ludwig, *Nine Etched from Life* (New York/London: R. M. McBride, 1969), 348; Lion Feuchtwanger, *Moscow 1937. My Visit Described for My Friends* (London: Viking Press, 1937), 76; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Seventh Son. The Thought and Writing of W.E.B. Du Bois*, Vol. II. (New York: Random House, 1971), 619; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Truth About Soviet Russia* (New York/London/Toronto: Longmans, Green And Co., 1942), 16, 18.

⁶⁸ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), 804.

⁶⁹ Jerome Davis, *Behind Soviet Power: Stalin and the Russians* (New York: Readers' Press, 1946), 12.

⁷⁰ Bernal quoted in Gary Werskey, *The Visible College: The Collective Biography of British Scientific Socialists of the 1930s* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 318.

⁷¹ Pablo Neruda, *Memoirs*, trans. by Hardie St.Martin (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1977), 319.

his endorsement of dictators of different ideological persuasion: "Mussolini, Kemal, Pilsudski, Hitler and the rest can all depend on me to judge them by their ability to deliver the goods. . . . Stalin has delivered the goods to an extent that seemed impossible ten years ago; and I take off my hat to him accordingly."⁷²

Views of Mao (or rather, the qualities projected upon him) were similar to those of Stalin, especially the curious belief that both exercised power in a new and benign way. Mao was also seen as the brilliant philosopher king, veritable renaissance man whose thoughts "held China together" according to Jan Myrdal, the Swedish author. Dick Wilson, a British Sinologist, was certain that Mao "wanted to be remembered, above all, as a teacher." Michael Oksenberg, an American political scientist, saw him as "both a philosopher and politician . . . he combined qualities which rarely coexist in one being. . . . He was an inquisitive thinker who savored power, a visionary who remained an activist. . . ."⁷³ Felix Greene, the British journalist had a similarly exalted vision of Mao and his associates proposing that "China is not being led by a group of men hungry for personal power. . . . It is, rather a leadership that has shown itself genuinely concerned with the welfare of the people . . . there is no evidence of jockeying for power or of the personal rivalry. . . ." In the same spirit, John K. Fairbank, the American sinologist, dismissed the idea of a power struggle following Mao's death, suggesting that "Ford vs. Carter is a more naked power struggle than anything going on in Peking."⁷⁴

Orville Schell, the American author and journalist took a startlingly religious view of Mao replete with Christian imagery:

⁷² Quoted in G.B. Shaw, H.G. Keynes, et al., *Stalin-Wells Talk. The Verbatim Record and Discussion* (London: the New Statesman And Nation, 1934), 47.

⁷³ Dick Wilson, ed., *Mao Tse Tung in the Scales of History. A Preliminary Assessment Organized by the China Quarterly* (Contemporary China Institute Publications) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 8; Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *China. The Revolution Continued* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 191; Michel Oksenberg, "The Political Leader," in Wilson, ed., *Mao Tse Tung in the Scales of History*, 70.

⁷⁴ Felix Greene, *China. The Country Americans are not Allowed to Know* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 143-44; John K. Fairbanks, *New York Review of Books*, October 14, 1976, 3.

even prior to his death, Mao had *transcended his own personality*. . . . Mao was a thinker as well as a doer. He conceived of the Chinese revolution and then helped it to happen. And, in the process, the *thought of Chairman Mao became inculcated in almost every Chinese. The word almost literally became flesh*. And it seemed clear, even before Mao died, that his death could not erase the way in which *he had almost become transubstantiated in his people* [my emphasis].⁷⁵

Jan Myrdal too was assured that Mao's legacy will endure since he "solved the problem [of] how . . . the revolution can be prevented from degenerating."⁷⁶

Hewlett Johnson, who admired both Stalin and Mao, replicated the spectacular delusions he harbored of Stalin in his perception of Mao. What struck him most about Mao "was something no picture had ever caught, an inexpressible look of kindness and sympathy, an obvious preoccupation with the needs of others."⁷⁷ Similarly reminiscent of the grotesque misreadings of Stalin's personality was the belief Dick Wilson shared with other visiting intellectuals that Mao "often exhibited a refreshing personal humility" and disapproved of his veneration.⁷⁸

Simone de Beauvoir was most impressed by what struck her as the authenticity of the Chinese leaders: "What is so winning about the Chinese leaders is that not one of them plays a part; they are dressed like anybody else . . . and their faces are not deformed either by class mannerism or by . . . the need to maintain front . . . these are just faces, plainly and wholly human."⁷⁹ Doubtlessly she was unaware (as were other sympathetic visitors) of the immense efforts the Chinese

⁷⁵ Orville Schell, *In the People's Republic: An American's First-Hand View of Living and Working in China* (New York: Random House, 1977), vii–viii.

⁷⁶ Myrdal and Kessle, *China*, 187.

⁷⁷ Hewlett Johnson, *China's New Creative Age* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1953), 153.

⁷⁸ Wilson, *Mao Tse Tung in the Scales of History*, 2, and Andrew Nathan, "Imperialism's Effects on China," *Concerned Asian Scholars: China*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1972): 46.

⁷⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March* (Cleveland and New York: World Pub. Co., 1958), 429.

(and other communist) governments made to create favorable impressions on important foreign visitors.⁸⁰

The admiration of Fidel Castro on the part of many Western intellectuals has been the purest case of hero worship. By the time he rose to power the Soviet system and Stalin were largely discredited mainly as a result of Khrushchev's revelations in 1956. Subsequently many alienated Western intellectuals were ready to embrace some new, revolutionary incarnation of their hopes and longings. They found it in the Third World, in China, Cuba, Vietnam, and later Nicaragua. Castro was exceptionally well-suited to be the recipient of such sentiments. He was young, handsome, dynamic, articulate, a genuine revolutionary and guerilla fighter who overthrew an oppressive political regime. He was indisputably the most charismatic of all dictators here considered. He was also an impassioned critic of the United States and everything it stood for, an impassioned anticapitalist, as well as the leader of a country that many considered a victim of US imperialism. As Dennis Wrong put it, he was "a natural hero for the New Left from the first . . . , a genuine hero in an age of characterless bureaucratic leaders."⁸¹ He was equally acclaimed by Latin American intellectuals: ". . . intellectuals in this part of the world have reflexively accorded him and other revolutionary, anti-American leaders—Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela—immunity to the moral standards, applied to other leaders."⁸²

Norman Mailer, eager to find and commend a powerful hero, was among Castro's most ardent admirers:

you gave all of us who are alone in this country . . . some sense that there were heroes in the world . . . It was as if the ghost of Cortez had appeared in our century riding Zapata's white horse. You were first and greatest hero to appear in the world since the Second War . . . you gave a bit of life to the best and most pas-

⁸⁰ For a detailed examination of such efforts, see Ch. 8., "Techniques of Hospitality" in Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 347–99.

⁸¹ Dennis Wrong, "The American Left and Cuba," *Commentary* (February 1962), 99.

⁸² Larry Rohter, "In Latin America, the Cult of Revolution Wanes," *New York Times*, May 18, 2003.

sionate men and women all over the earth, you are the answer to the argument . . . that revolutions cannot last, that they turn corrupt or total or they eat their own.⁸³

Mailer's attitude and behavior is among many which prompt reflections about the confluence of the personal and political realms of the human psyche. His attraction to and respect for what he considered authentic, liberating violence (not confined to the political arena) probably also played an important part in his admiration of Castro. The most notorious manifestation of these proclivities was his vocal support of the convicted murderer, Jack Abbot (also a critic of American society), who had corresponded with Mailer for several years before being paroled with Mailer's help. His early release was rapidly followed by committing another murder.⁸⁴

Jean Paul Sartre was similarly entranced by Castro's apparent authenticity and especially by his capacity to realize the fondest dream of intellectuals: bridging the gap between word and deed, theory and practice, the personal and the political. Sartre was particularly impressed when Castro told him that he became a "professional revolutionary" because "I can't stand injustice." Sartre wrote: "What pleased me in this answer was that this man—who fought . . . for a whole people and who has no other interests than theirs—first recalled for me his personal passions, his private life. . . . He learned *the inanity of words*" [My emphasis].⁸⁵ This was the same man who bombarded his largely captive audiences with speeches which could last for five or six hours!

For Sartre, Castro and Che Guevara promised nothing less than overcoming the limitations of the human condition, the triumph of the mind over the body. Sartre claimed to be revitalized by the energy and spirit of these supermen. A midnight visit to Che Guevara's office prompted these reflections:

⁸³ Mailer, "Letter to Castro," *Presidential Papers* (New York, 1963), 67–68, 75.

⁸⁴ See also Naomi Munson and James Atlas, "On Norman Mailer and Jack Abbot: The Literary Life of Crime," *New Republic*, September 9, 1981, 18–23; and Lionel Abel, "Murder and the Intellectuals," *Commentary* (November 1981), available at (<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/murder-and-the-intellectuals/>).

⁸⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Cuba* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 44.

I heard the door close behind my back and I lost both the memory of my old fatigue and any notion of the hour. Among these fully awake men, at the height of their powers, sleeping doesn't seem like a natural need, just a routine of which they had more or less freed themselves . . . they have all excluded the routine alternation of lunch and dinner from their daily program. . . . Of all these night watchmen, Castro is the most wide awake. Of all these fasting people, Castro can eat the most and fast the longest. [They] exercise a veritable dictatorship over their own needs . . . they roll back the limits of the possible.⁸⁶

These priceless projections illuminate with great clarity Sartre's own longings and fantasies, and his reverence for these renaissance men who, he believed, succeeded in overcoming their human frailties and limitations that he himself would have liked to overcome. This was hero-worshipping at its purest, only tangentially related to the social-political causes and transformations these supermen sought to bring about.

Castro's selflessness and charisma made a similar impression on Elizabeth Sutherland, journalist and arts editor of *The Nation* at the time: "He seems . . . utterly devoted to the welfare of his people. . . . When he speaks, it is as if his own dedication and energy were directly transfused into his listeners with almost physical force. Possessed of an extraordinary instinct for rhythm and voice pitch, he builds his speeches . . . like long poems."⁸⁷ Frank Mankiewicz and Kirby Jones found Castro "one of the most charming and entertaining men either of us had ever met . . . [he] is personally overpowering . . . one of the truly electrifying personalities in the world in which his peers seem dull and pedestrian."⁸⁸ Julius Lester, an Afro-American writer believed (at any rate in 1968) in a mysterious convergence between the supreme leader and his people: "The West says a 'cult of personality' exists in the figures of Mao and Fidel. That is not true. Revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary commitment destroyed the ego in Mao

⁸⁶ Ibid., 99, 102, 103.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Sutherland, "Cubans' Faith in Castro," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, December 7, 1961.

⁸⁸ Frank Mankiewicz and Kirby Jones, *With Fidel: A Portrait of Castro and Cuba* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1975), 9, 10.

and Fidel, and in that destruction, they as men became free. Mao is China. Fidel is Cuba. China is Mao. Cuba is Fidel.”⁸⁹

It never seems to occur to the admirers of dictators that their charisma and sense of mission is embedded in megalomania. Saul Landau was capable of believing that Castro was “a man who has been steeped in democracy . . . , a humble man.”⁹⁰ Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy entertained similar projections: “First and foremost, Fidel is a passionate humanitarian . . . he feels compassion for human suffering . . . and is totally committed to building in Cuba a society in which the poor and underprivileged shall be able to hold up their heads. . . . He treats people within this framework—kindly, sternly, implacably, according to their . . . role in creating or hindering the creation of the good society.”⁹¹ Angela Davis (who remained a supporter of the Soviet Union and received in 1979 the Lenin Peace Prize) reported that “talking to almost any Cuban about Fidel, it soon becomes clear that they . . . see him as . . . an extremely warm human being endowed with great leadership talents . . . , people loved him in large part because of his honesty with them. Fidel was their leader, but most important he was also their brother in the largest sense of the word.”⁹²

Fidel Castro, as the other dictators here discussed, also had a reputation among the admiring intellectuals of being a brilliant fellow intellectual, not only an active, authentic revolutionary, but a deep thinker. He made a point of having read (or claiming to have read) books written by some of his foreign visitors and conducting lengthy discussions with the more important ones. He told C. Wright Mills, “that his *Power Elite* had been a bedside book of most of the *guerrilleros* in the Sierra Madre. Castro invited him to come on a tour . . . of the country. They spent three and a half days together devoting an average of eighteen hours in every twenty-four to discussions.”⁹³ Elizabeth

⁸⁹ Julius Lester, *Revolutionary Notes* (New York: Richard W. Baron, 1968), 177.

⁹⁰ Saul Landau, “Cuba: The Present Reality,” *New Left Review* (May–June 1961): 15.

⁹¹ Leo Huberman and Paul E. Sweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), 57.

⁹² Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 207.

⁹³ K.S. Karol, *Guerillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1970), 58.

Sutherland wrote that he was “above all an educator of his people. . . . When he spoke in public, the scene often resembled a huge . . . classroom. . . . A concern with morality, especially, honesty dominated his teachings.”⁹⁴

Castro’s allegedly encyclopedic knowledge and attention to detail was an aspect of his personality he shared with other modern dictators, as well as the kings and emperors of the past: “He does know . . . the annual construction rate of schools, housing, factories and hospitals . . . their scheduled dates for conclusion and the building plans projected for the next five to ten years. He knows the number of students at each level of the educational process. . . . He knows the water temperatures at the fishing ports and when they are most favorable for catching various fish. He knows how many feet can be spanned by concrete. . . . He knows, almost hourly, sugar’s price on the world market. . . .”⁹⁵

Few relationships between a dictator and an intellectual have been as intimate, durable and mutually beneficial as that between Castro and Gabriel García Márquez, the famous writer.⁹⁶ Márquez was not merely a foreign admirer occasionally visiting Cuba, he had easy and regular access to Castro and “was showered with privilege: his own institute of cinema in Havana . . . a mansion, a Mercedes, a staff of servants.”⁹⁷ He was “Panegyrist, court adviser, press agent, ambassador-at-large, plenipotentiary representative, head of foreign public relations . . . all these things for Castro.” In 1996, he told President Clinton “if you and Fidel could sit face to face, there wouldn’t be any problem left,”⁹⁸—a proposition at once dishonest and foolish.

Márquez’s loyalty survived each and every moral outrage and political setback associated with Castro’s rule, including occasions when formerly supportive intellectuals could no longer tolerate his repressive policies and especially the persecution of dissenters such as Heberto Padilla. If and when Márquez had some qualms about Castro’s policies it was not on account of their moral defects but

⁹⁴ Sutherland, “Cubans’ Faith in Castro,” 112.

⁹⁵ Jones and Mankiewicz, *With Fidel*, 217–18.

⁹⁶ The same point was made by Enrique Krauze in “In the Shadow of the Patriarch,” 38.

⁹⁷ Charles Lane, “The Writer and His Labyrinth,” *New Republic*, August 25, 1987, 33.

⁹⁸ Krauze, “In the Shadow of the Patriarch,” 46.

because of the possibility that his enemies could use them to discredit him. As Charles Lane wrote, "Castro has no more fervent defender than García Márquez . . . [who] never gave up the ambition of being useful to Castro. . . . 'Fidel is one of the people I love most in the world,' he explained."⁹⁹

In 1959 Márquez was invited to cover the trials and executions of hundreds of former officers of Batista's army and "came away from this grim spectacle a believer, accepting an offer to help open a bureau of *Prensa Latina*, Castro's official wire service."¹⁰⁰ According to Krauze, Márquez professed an absolute faith in the Revolution as it was incarnated in the heroic figure of the Commandante and "in thirty four turbulent years [he] has never publicly detached himself from that epiphanic vision. . . . What he saw . . . was what he wanted to see: five million Cubans who belonged to the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, not as spies and enforcers of the Revolution but as its happy, spontaneous, multitudinous true force." Márquez also believed that Castro established an "almost telepathic system of communication" with the people. Furthermore, "his gaze revealed the hidden softness of his childlike heart . . . he has survived unscathed the harsh and insidious corrosion of daily power. . . . He has set up a whole system of defense against the cult of personality. . . .' Castro had managed to achieve the 'coveted and elusive' dream of all rulers: 'affection.'"¹⁰¹

In short, Márquez would have us believe that Castro miraculously escaped the corruptions of power. He also proposed—most implausibly—that Castro "is afflicted by 'shyness' and . . . is 'one of the greatest idealists of our time,' [and] a profound intellectual who 'breakfasts with no less than 200 pages of news from all over the world,' reads treatises on orthopedics in his spare time. . . ."¹⁰² If, as I suggested earlier, intellectuals are attracted to dictators because of their belief that they embody both idealism and power wisely used—for Márquez the attractions of power played an unusually large part. Charles Lane wrote:

⁹⁹ Lane, "The Writer and His Labyrinth," 33, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Lane, "The Writer and His Labyrinth," 33.

¹⁰¹ Krauze, "In the Shadow of the Patriarch," 46, 44.

¹⁰² Quoted in Lane, "The Writer and His Labyrinth," 34.

All his passions and his principles notwithstanding, García Márquez has an unconquerable weakness for power . . . , [his] power-worship was already evident on his early trips to Eastern Europe. His biographer chronicled his strange fascination with Stalin's embalmed corpse: "nothing impressed me so much as the delicacy of his hands. . . . In no way did he resemble the heartless character Nikita Khrushchev denounced in a terrible rant." [Márquez said] Martin [the biographer] also records . . . [Márquez's] "intoxication" at the physical proximity of János Kádár, the man who suppressed the Hungarian uprising whose deeds he strives to justify. Upon learning of the execution of . . . Imre Nagy Márquez criticizes the act not in moral terms but as a "political mistake."¹⁰³

As his long association with, and the numerous tasks he performed in Castro's service indicate, the idealism of Márquez was contaminated by his thirst for power, influence, and recognition unrelated to his literary accomplishments. His avid "collaboration with oppression and dictatorship" (as Krauze put it) is among the most repellent instances of the treason of intellectuals.

The affinity between communist dictators and intellectuals has not been limited to the cases discussed above. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua also had their fans among intellectuals as did most recently Hugo Chávez of Venezuela admittedly far less vicious and powerful than his better-known colleagues. Like other, more murderous dictators, he "was convinced that he was carrying out an earthly mission guided by superhuman force . . . [he said] 'I get everything I need straight from the people, the people on the street.'" Krauze also wrote that "[his] omnipotence is owed to his omnipresence. . . . Presiding over his silent, acquiescent ministers . . . the Commandante tells stories from his life and . . . about romantic adventures, gastric ailments, baseball games; he also sings, dances, recites, prays. . . . All of this has struck some American journalists—and movie people such Oliver Stone and Sean Penn—as folksy, authentic and even patriotic."¹⁰⁴ Western admir-

¹⁰³ Krauze, "In the Shadow of the Patriarch," 42.

¹⁰⁴ Enrique Krauze, "The Shah of Venezuela," *New Republic*, April 1, 2009, 31, 37.

ers of Chávez included Tariq Ali, the British author and activist of longstanding leftist credentials as well as Hollywood celebrities.¹⁰⁵ For some time, Chávez also had a warm relationship of mutual admiration with Noam Chomsky doubtlessly based in large measure on their shared and fervent anti-Americanism.¹⁰⁶

V.

Several patterns and findings emerge from this survey of the attitude of certain Western intellectuals toward dictators. The most obvious is that they made profoundly wrongheaded judgments with great confidence. Their attraction to dictators was in part generated by the strongly felt dissatisfaction with modernity that combined with the hatred of capitalism and predisposed them to a compensatory hero worship. They sincerely believed that the dictators personified idealistic, purposeful, and just political systems. They knew little of the gulf between the dictators' professed goals and ideals and the prevailing conditions in the countries they ruled. They wishfully projected upon the dictators qualities and attributes they admired (but the dictators did not possess)—a process made easier by ignorance and selective perception.

The highly valued qualities projected upon these figures included authenticity, kindness, wisdom, courage, the capacity for the just use of power and an exceptional understanding of history and human nature that enabled them to meld theory and practice, ideals and realities. The imputed authenticity and heroic personal qualities of the dictators seemed to make a deeper impression on these intellectuals than the dictators' specific beliefs, ideologies, and policies. These intellectuals

¹⁰⁵ See Tariq Ali, "Diary," *London Review of Books*, June 21, 2007 and "Celebrity Fans," *Newsweek*, September 3, 2007. See also Juan Forrero, "Visitors Seek a Taste of Revolution in Venezuela," *New York Times*, March 21, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/21/world/americas/visitors-seek-a-taste-of-revolution-in-venezuela.html>

¹⁰⁶ Chomsky visited Venezuela and appeared with Chávez at rallies while Chávez was fond of quoting Chomsky in his speeches. The relationship soured when Chomsky expressed criticism of particular cases of human rights violations in Venezuela.

found and admired, for the most part, similar or identical qualities in nazi, fascist, and communist dictators.

These highly patterned and often bizarre misperceptions may best be explained by a pressing need on the part of intellectuals to find alternatives to the social, political, and cultural conditions they deplored in their own society. It is also possible and likely that individuals who gravitate to the role of the intellectual are, to begin with, predisposed to discontent with longstanding, familiar social arrangements, (perhaps their own life as well). Their overdeveloped capacity for wishful thinking and projection can be linked to secular religious impulses and an overestimation of the political determinants of individual happiness and sense of purpose. Not surprisingly this examination of the relationship between dictators and intellectuals sheds far more light on the disposition of latter than that of the former. However even the idealized and mistaken views of dictators entertained by these intellectuals help to understand the appeals of the dictators and the circumstances which are conducive to their rise to power.

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*A “Beautiful” Dream:
Mussolini’s Delirium of Omnipotence and
the Aesthetics of the Sublime*

In one of the first hagiographic biographies of Mussolini, first published in English in 1925, Margherita Sarfatti interviewed Mussolini, her lover, eliciting poetic and dramatized statements about his life experiences, political struggles, and philosophical perspectives.¹ Embedded within his remembrances of early childhood and enshrined against a mythology of the war, Mussolini’s responses projected a fascinating image of his persona as temperamental and brooding, yet wise and trustworthy—an image that was part of a choreographed construction of Mussolini ever since he first emerged onto the Italian political scene in the early 1910s. At that time, Mussolini was saluted as a novel figure in political circles and became a favorite subject for the rising popular genre of biographies. Much in advance of Sarfatti’s 1925 portrayal of the fascist leader, biographies of Mussolini began to be published in 1915, even ahead of his glorified participation as a soldier in World War I. Torquato Nanni wrote the first short history of Mussolini’s life at the solicitation of one of the leaders of the avant-garde literary group *La Voce*, Giuseppe Prezzolini.² Adopting a modern linguistic style, Nanni defined Mussolini as a “spirit of steel at the service of a formidable will,” and he emphasized the unique, exemplary qualities

¹ Margherita Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1925).

² Torquato Nanni, *Benito Mussolini* (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1915). Republished in Emilio Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e “La Voce”* (Florence: Sansoni, 1976).

of this exceptional person—"a *man*," in Prezolini's 1913 definition.³ Following Nanni's, all early biographies of Mussolini focused on his patriotism, passion, and seriousness, and all exalted him as an incarnation of the Italians' best qualities—a man whose extraordinary virtues predestined him to be the savior of a troubled country, its unsurpassable leader.⁴

One among the most striking tropes that arose from this hagiographic and mythmaking exercise, and that Sarfatti underlined as central to Mussolini's essence, was the equation of Mussolini's life with art. Sarfatti pointed to the one defining phrase that Mussolini liked to repeat: "I shall make my own life my masterpiece," as evidence that Mussolini's approach to statesmanship implied an artist's sensibility.⁵ Political work was the leader's "living creation" through an active pursuit of perfection—a lofty ambition in spite of the concrete, restricted actions the art of statesmanship required.⁶ Sarfatti built a halo around the figure of Mussolini that made him an attractive leader as much concerned about the moral destiny of his country as he was about its economic welfare. She, as well as Mussolini in the preface he wrote for the book, emphasized the presence of his artistic proclivity as proof of the higher ends guiding Mussolini's political work—an example of an antimaterialistic, spiritual crusade in the name of the country's best interests.

This chapter focuses on the aesthetic dimensions of Mussolini's politics and particularly counters the apparently natural comparison of art with superior spiritual aims, at which both Sarfatti and Mussolini hinted. Rather than accepting Sarfatti's and Mussolini's implied identity of poetic inclination with an admirable political mission, I examine the overlapping and ultimate coincidence between Mussolini's aesthetic vision of fascism and his dream of total control, drawing attention to the totalitarian implications of the artistic metaphors Mussolini invoked. Mussolini's aesthetic approach to politics was far

³ Ibid., 163. Prezolini wrote of Mussolini in the December 4, 1913 article for *La Voce*, "This man is a *man* and stands out even more in a world of half-figures and consciences that are finished like worn-out rubber bands." Cited in Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e "La Voce"*, 18.

⁴ See Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario* (Bari: Laterza, 1991).

⁵ Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 76.

⁶ Ibid.

from benign, I claim, and the questionable consequences of his aesthetic interpretation of public affairs need to be exposed and evaluated.

In what follows, I first present the diverse elements that contributed to the reverential halo surrounding depictions of Mussolini and I survey Mussolini's understanding of politics as art. I then highlight critical philosophical aspects of Mussolini's aesthetic-political approach in order to configure the absolutist direction Mussolini took with his art metaphor. Finally, I conclude with a reflection on totalitarianism's aesthetic dimensions, and, on that basis, I underline the profoundly undemocratic and illiberal nature of fascism's project.

Since 1915, when Nanni first tried his hand at an original portrait of the rising duce, biographers had been busy formulating a romantic depiction of Mussolini.⁷ Dark-eyed, somber, thoughtful, Mussolini was the epitome of the romantic hero with his rebellious tendencies and combative nature, darting looks and controlled exuberance. Admiring writers recounted Mussolini's childhood as a predictor of his future success: the young man showed maturity, despite being hot-blooded, and he possessed a keen sense of intolerance for inequities. In lyrical tones, biographers depicted Mussolini as able to surmount the hardships of poverty and the humiliations incumbent on him as an immigrant in Switzerland. Stamina and pride never abandoned this rising star of Italian politics, and his shining path was visible to anybody who had eyes for gauging signs of forthcoming triumphs.

The duce himself had helped circulate this image of romantic hero. In a war diary published in the daily *Il Popolo d'Italia* from late 1915 to early 1917, Mussolini inserted several episodes of his biographical history that were supposed to highlight his fascinating personality, full of passions and emotions.⁸ From his nomadic instincts as a young child to his contempt of danger as he came of age, Mussolini displayed the characteristics of a heroic figure that could not but impose his larger-than-life force. Poetic passages he wrote on the landscapes of

⁷ According to Renzo De Felice and Luigi Goglia, *Mussolini: Il mito* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1983), 7, the name of *duce* was given to Mussolini by a fellow socialist in 1904.

⁸ Benito Mussolini, *Il mio diario di guerra (1915–1917)* in *Opera Omnia*, 36 vols. (Florence: La Fenice, 1951–63), vol. XXXIV. See Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario*, for a discussion of the diary in terms of biographical history.

the war zones, although certainly of mediocre quality, enhanced this ideal romantic portrait; they suggested a sensitive soul attentive to the beauty of nature even as the latter was ravaged by a violent conflict of enormous proportions. Physical strength, sense of duty and spirit of fraternity then combined to make of Mussolini the perfect soldier, respectful of authority and full of initiative, ready for sacrifice and fearless, generous and humble, ultimately loved and admired by all.

Mussolini seemed prescient about his future role as a public figure, and his writings reflect an almost eerie awareness of the prospective larger audiences that would eventually read or be told of his personal life and past deeds. His short autobiography, *La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911*, appears to be constructed along these lines of clairvoyance.⁹ Written in prison during a five-month stay following an arrest for protesting Italy's intervention in Libya, Mussolini's self-reflections on the first three decades of his life underscored the combination of strength and sensitivity as the winning formula for the successful man, the natural-born leader, and indisputable visionary. Surely not lacking in self-confidence, Mussolini constructed his own aura according to that formula and provided abundant material from which his future biographers could draw. Although the latter selectively highlighted key moments of the duce's exemplary existence, they felt free to circulate legendary depictions of fascism's leader built on the foundations Mussolini himself had laid.

From this crosspollination between Mussolini and his biographers, dominant narrative elements emerged. Stories ascribed qualities to the duce that demonstrated his exceptional status and that solidified the ground on which he could advance legitimate claims to a leading role in Italian politics. Mussolini's dynamism and youthfulness were contrasted to the old political elites and their mediocrity, and his strong will was said to put to shame the cautiousness of traditional party representatives. Mussolini's sense of sacrifice and responsibility elevated him above a corrupted world that was desperately awaiting a savior, as Antonio Beltramelli argued in his biography.¹⁰ This image of Mussolini as above the fray, superior, and unique recurred in all the

⁹ See Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXXIII.

¹⁰ See Antonio Beltramelli, *L'uomo nuovo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1923). Beltramelli's was the first full-length biography of Mussolini.

accounts written about the fascist leader, especially after he became prime minister in the wake of the infamous March on Rome in October 28, 1922. Embedded within this image was the God-like standing Mussolini supposedly enjoyed because of his extraordinary virtues and incomparable abilities.

Sarfatti's biography can be considered the zenith of the divinization of Mussolini in this first phase of hagiographic narrations. A good 350 pages in its original English edition, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, which the author coquettishly qualified as a "woman's book," assembled in a venerating tone the main events and facts punctuating the existence of the duce.¹¹ Negatively comparing her work against the potential "downright and vigorous" book Mussolini could have written if he had decided to narrate his own life, Sarfatti was nevertheless proud of the opportunity she enjoyed to shine a light on one of "the greatest figures in history."¹² A genius/hero, her Mussolini was set on a mission to renew the life of his own people and country, both of whom he deeply cherished; he was driven by a lofty passion for public service that he considered an eminently grave thing, "serious and tremendous."¹³ Never quite an ordinary fellow, though of humble origins, Mussolini was different from the common man: an "aristocratic son of the people" and a "true leader," he was "born to compel admiration and devotion" thanks to the force of his magnetic personality.¹⁴ An archetypical Italian both physically and spiritually, he was endowed with a "square face," "imperious strength and obstinate will," signs of being "a Roman from top to toe and to the marrow of his bones."¹⁵ Mussolini possessed an interior force that elevated him above the pettiness of mundane affairs and made him stoically confront and dominate moments of exceptional crisis. In the trenches of World War I, he never complained about his fate as a soldier or the harsh conditions he faced, instead displaying "the quiet sorrow of a strong man."¹⁶ When, gravely wounded under a terrible bombardment in February 1917, Mussolini was taken

¹¹ Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 346. The book was published in Italian in 1926 as *Dux* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926).

¹² Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini*, 346.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19, 186.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 331–32, 51–52. See also 338.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 254, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

to surgery and “felt the knife enter his flesh, he met the spasm of pain by closing his lips with a smothered curse,” Sarfatti wrote, comparing Mussolini to Saint Sebastian.¹⁷ His control of pain reflected a powerful will and at the same time suggested a detachment from material matters—a prelude to the triumph of the spirit.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, in the heydays of his socialist faith and before he moved to found his own (fascist) movement, Mussolini proclaimed the superiority of “Idealistic Socialism” against the crass materialism embodied “in the fat, well-fed officials of the Socialist Party.”¹⁹ Claims to spiritual higher ground underlined Mussolini’s early political engagement. Such invocations of greater morality boded well for his future project of a new movement. They would later become a dominant motif in fascist Italy.

The romantic depiction of Mussolini that his biographers were busy formulating since 1915 fed on different interwoven threads that variously emphasized Mussolini’s youth, dynamism, spiritual essence, exceptional qualities and leadership. The threads did not intuitively provide an opening to the notion of Mussolini as an artist; yet, this idea was there, stubbornly attached to a vision of politics that overlapped with life itself, as Sarfatti’s biography emphasized. The notion of politics as art was indeed sponsored by Mussolini. In the preface to Sarfatti’s book, he set the tone for and revealed the direction he wished his biographers to take when casting his leadership figure: Mussolini was supposed to be represented as embodying the whole of Italy and as being at one with the nation. As he wrote in his preface:

I have sometimes meditated upon the fate, grotesque and sublime, of the public man.... The public man is born “public”—he bears the stigma from his birth... The public man, like the poet, is born to his doom. He can never escape it. His tragedy is one of infinite range.... [I]t is the thought, the realization, that I no longer belong merely to myself, that I belong to all—loved by all, hated by all—that I am an essential element in the lives of others: this feeling has on me a kind of intoxicating effect.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 230.

¹⁸ Ibid., 301, 245.

¹⁹ Ibid., 164, 165.

²⁰ Ibid., 9–10.

The notion of the public man belonging to all and doomed to his fate at first sight would not seem to share much with the concept of art. Yet Mussolini's reference to the poet provided the hint that was translated by Sarfatti into aesthetic analogies and later came to be encapsulated in the metaphor of a sculptor at work on a statue. As she wrote, "The artist pure and simple aims at once higher and lower. He strives to put the best of himself into his work, into his living creation, and to do so with a perfection which neither time nor place can destroy; and his creation is, in a way, detached from himself."²¹ Egoistic, but still aiming at "loftier ambition,"²² Sarfatti continued, the art of statesmanship allowed Mussolini to fulfill his grandest aspiration, "I am obsessed by this wild desire—it consumes my whole being. I want to make a mark on my era with my will, like a lion with its claw!" he confessed to Sarfatti.²³ Mussolini was actively involved in constructing his masterpiece and, what is even more interesting, in his role of creator he was paradoxically above physical reality and would ethereally operate through his will. He represented the triumph of the spirit against the lure of materialism—a triumph confirmed by references to the sublime interspersed throughout Sarfatti's book (more on the sublime below).

The artistic threads that Sarfatti wove in her biography of Mussolini were turned into fabric in Emil Ludwig's exchange of ideas with the leader of fascism. A renowned biographer, Ludwig held a series of stimulating conversations with Mussolini at the end of March and the beginning of April of 1932. The dialogs were later gathered in a book published that same year in Italian as *Colloqui con Mussolini*. In his introduction to the volume, Ludwig confessed that, although previously distrustful of the Italian dictator, he had changed his mind about Mussolini for several reasons, the most important being the question of personality. As he revealingly admitted with reference to his altered opinion, "in me operates the artistic interest in an exceptional personality."²⁴ On the basis of that "artistic interest," Ludwig decided to treat Mussolini as a "phenomenon" rather than as the leader of a specific political movement whose ideological orientation he hardly

²¹ Ibid., 76.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 345.

²⁴ Emil Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1932), 16.

approved.²⁵ Thus, whether he wished to convince himself or truly believed in his diagnosis of an existing hiatus between Mussolini and the fascist movement, Ludwig described Mussolini as holding ideas that did not quite fit fascist orthodoxy. By separating the leader from the movement, he focused on the man while eschewing the liabilities of the authoritarian regime that man was leading. In particular, being a pacifist, Ludwig was interested in assessing whether Europe would have to fear this powerful figure whose activism was renowned. His conclusions, fruit of a “psychological” study of the dictator, were negative and instead exalted Mussolini as a great statesman and an equally exceptional man of action driven by a constructive passion.

According to Ludwig, Mussolini was a philosophical spirit endowed with moral power and inoculated against pursuits of grandiosity and war.²⁶ The fascist leader’s emphasis on construction testified that no harm could come from him. Ludwig’s most lyrical, positive descriptions of Mussolini indeed emerge in relation to the duce’s creative abilities: “Thus in him we find the resting seriousness of the man creator to whom nobody would ascribe a dictatorial nature.”²⁷ Creativity and “the calm of a person who has gone through a lot” ensured the peaceful character of Mussolini’s intentions on the international scene and soothed the pacifist Ludwig, while confirming his belief in the affinity between poet and statesman.²⁸ Mussolini offered Ludwig an utmost example of the *homo activus* in general, a model of the relationship between artist and political leader.²⁹

The belief in unique personalities and outstanding figures typical of the time certainly facilitated Ludwig’s identification of the poetic/artistic genius with the charismatic politician, the latter intended as a unique embodiment of what Max Weber theorized as non-routine.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 37–38.

²⁷ Ibid., 133.

²⁸ Ibid., 184.

²⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰ On personality, see Warren Susman, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture,” in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). On Weber, see *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 1, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

Ludwig was interested in the opposition between action and contemplation and saw action as a form of constructive work leading to moral power. The mere fact that Mussolini had a "vision" guiding his actions, not just petty motives that usually made politics such a base, small-minded affair, closely aligned the fascist dictator with artistic, creative spirit. And having vision was a sufficient element to convince Ludwig of Mussolini's virtue as a steady, reliable, and thoughtful leader. The following passage might have been fundamental to persuading Ludwig of Mussolini's worth. When he asked the fascist leader if during the events of the March on Rome he felt like a prophet or artist, Mussolini replied "artist"—"an artist that begins his work" as opposed to "a prophet that follows his mission."³¹ Later on, Mussolini added more flesh to his choice of art. "Doesn't the sculptor sometimes break the marble out of rage because under his hands it does not precisely mold according to his original vision? Everything depends on that, to dominate the masses as an artist."³² In Mussolini's version, artistic ability allowed for the revitalization of politics and the redemption of World War I's senseless violence; the artist constructs. Along these lines, he told Ludwig, he admired Pirandello's theater because it suggested that "the world is what we want to make of it, it is our creation."³³ Poetic sentiments ensured results. Not surprisingly, when Ludwig stated, "the man of action does not become great without a poetic vein," Mussolini confirmed that the politician "cannot reach any results without a poetic sentiment."³⁴

Artistic references convinced Ludwig to absolve Mussolini of all the other faults he was guilty of (repression, control, lack of freedom); creativity confirmed the dictator's spiritual proclivities as guarantee against material interests and pursuits. Like Sarfatti, Ludwig pitted materialism against spiritualism in a specious interpretation of the two and recognized Mussolini as led by higher goals than the achievement of mere interests. Mussolini's artistic references to the masses as a disembodied matter paradoxically came to be interpreted as the proof of a spiritual enterprise. Never mind that Mussolini's antimaterialist posi-

³¹ Ludwig, *Colloqui*, 96.

³² *Ibid.*, 125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

tion was predicated upon an attack on the body and the individual's sensual activities, as well as the obliteration of individual needs and desires, happiness, and pleasure. For Mussolini's spiritualism ultimately implied a depersonalized and desensitized body politic overseen by a self-created man. It implied a world reduced to inanimate things—matter indeed, not living bodies.

I believe that the metaphor of the artist enabled Mussolini to address three central tenets of his pseudo-philosophical beliefs: First, it captured the individualistic character of a leader standing above all others (the multitude or the masses) through the idea of the artist's singular genius. Second, it underlined the wider scope of the politician's role, now claiming for him the task of giving shape to the formless matter, the masses. Third, it highlighted the leader's pretensions to spirituality through the fantasy of *homo autotelus* who creates ex nihilo and self-referentially, while also crushing a disembodied polity. To Mussolini, artistry involved a transformative role; at the same time, the making of a masterpiece required a larger canvas than just one's own individual existence. Since Mussolini's exceptionality turned him into the natural bearer of Italy's destiny, he was meant to be the omnipotent creator fulfilling a grand design. What is an artist, after all, if not a genius pursuing the conversion of a personal fantastic vision into a this-worldly reality? The Italians provided Mussolini with the material for accomplishing this immense work; as a passive mass, they were receptacles for the creative spirit of the man of action who alone could reach sublime results. Being naturally inept and "female," the masses were by definition unable to create and construct.³⁵ "Has she ever done architectural work in all these years?" Mussolini asked Ludwig with reference to the woman's role. And he continued, "She is estranged from architecture, which is the synthesis of all arts."³⁶ Not even close to having an aesthetic inclination, the woman/mass was helpless and passive, and could not but depend on the strong will of the artist politician as he pursued his masterpiece through the manipulation of a literally inert matter.

But what did Mussolini intend by art? How did the tropes of spiritualism, construction, and creation participate in shaping his notion of

³⁵ Ibid., 65.

³⁶ Ibid., 166.

art? Mussolini subscribed to the idea of art exemplified by the *l'art pour l'art* movement—a movement that beginning in the nineteenth century came to denote artists' impulse to pursue autonomy and eschew the functionalization of everyday life. In the face of commercialization and the opening of markets for intellectual works, which were often economically unfavorable to artists, art came to represent for its practitioners the expressive dimensions and communal desires of humans against the purposive rationality of a world dominated by the cash nexus.³⁷ The proclamation of autonomy pursued by artists at this time entailed the complete separation of art from social life and its isolation from worldly affairs; it eventually culminated in the attempt to reduce the sensual and impose form. Because creativity and freedom required overcoming natural laws with their limits and closures, artists cut loose the senses and declared their independence from nature through the fable of autogenesis, the belief in a man's power over the senses and capacity for self-creation.³⁸ Within this scenario, creativity was boundless and unconditional.

The same principles to which *l'art pour l'art* subscribed applied to the artist politician personified by Mussolini. Mussolini approached his aesthetic-political work with a view of art's meaning completely indebted to the *l'art pour l'art* version. He expurgated sensory feelings and experience, or bodily perception, from his artistic creations—after all, the masses were dead matter, a block of marble to be shaped. And even though he exploited people's feelings and emotions to attract their support (much as art was the emotional refuge from instrumental rationality), he still denied the masses their senses and treated them as disembodied matter. This shapeless whole would only come alive under the hands of the leader, the sculptor's scalpel chiseling the block of marble into a masterpiece.

As mentioned above, this apotheosis of the senses' denial implicated the figure of the artist-politician. Through his manly spiritual

³⁷ On this issue, see in particular Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

³⁸ See Cornelia Klinger's discussion, "The Concept of the Sublime and the Beautiful in Kant and Lyotard," in *Constellations* 2, no. 20 (October 1995): 207–23.

attributes Mussolini was detached from and impermeable to the yoke of human emotions. Only through this sublimation was he able to conquer the volatile mass—a mass that he defined as feminine in opposition to his manly qualities. Indeed, the separation of the body from the spirit drawn by Mussolini rested on the gender division. Mussolini was very explicit about depicting emotions as a female characteristic, and he was equally explicit about soliciting emotions from the masses in view of their inability to think. Mussolini's scorn for women's rational capacities or, better, "constructive" abilities, to put it in the terms he and Ludwig used during their conversation on architecture, was one more signal of the strong identification Mussolini saw between men as artists and artists as builders, active creators and leaders—for the mass could not govern itself.

This gender dichotomy and its artistic implications help clarify our understanding of Mussolini's aesthetic emphasis, especially if we retrace the history of the gender/art link back to eighteenth-century philosophy, at a time when aesthetics was coming into being as a distinctive intellectual sphere. In an essay entitled "The Distinction of the Beautiful and the Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes," Kant argued that aesthetics divides the sexes along the lines of the sublime and the beautiful. He specifically wrote: "The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime."³⁹ What did Kant mean by the gender distinction? How was the sublime manly and the beautiful feminine? To answer this question, we need to examine the couplet beautiful/sublime and its historical unfolding.

In 1756, Edmund Burke wrote *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which he first systematized thoughts about these two evaluative notions.⁴⁰ Convinced that people abused the terms of beautiful and sublime without applying any discriminating criteria, Burke was determined to correct this faulty

³⁹ See Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, translated by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 201.

⁴⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008).

habit. He argued that an attentive examination of human passions, as well as a survey of the properties of things that arouse passions and of the laws of nature that make possible such excitement, would lead to a better understanding of the origins of ideas about the beautiful and sublime. They would also contribute to a more consistent and solid use of the terms. Although Burke admitted that we might all differ in the ways we reason and find pleasure, he believed that the standards we apply to reason and taste must be similar; without shared principles of judgment, it would be hard to imagine life in common. To be sure, Burke acknowledged, taste presented more challenges than reason when it came to agreeing on a judgement based on it, but he trusted that the difficulties of establishing a common ground in taste were due to lack of efforts at understanding. Principles guiding taste, he insisted, are common to all and involve the senses, imagination, and reason.

Burke's philosophical inquiry solved the intellectual conundrum of aesthetic judgment by providing a systematic classification of qualities pertaining to the sublime and beautiful: the sublime and the beautiful represented different things in nature. By calling "delight" any sensation that accompanies pain and by defining "pleasure" as any sensation of positive enjoyment, Burke devised a method for demarcating the sublime and beautiful. When we have an idea of pain but are not directly affected by pain we are in the presence of the sublime; when we feel a sense of affection or tenderness, we are experiencing beauty.⁴¹ Burke particularly located in nature the passions caused by the sublime, with the strongest feeling being astonishment often accompanied by horror and terror.⁴² Obscurity, infinity, and greatness of dimensions all powerfully evoked the sublime. Beauty was instead caused by the sensible qualities of things that act on our minds through the senses: smallness, smoothness, delicacy, and variety.⁴³ Burke definitively posited the beautiful and sublime as mutually exclusive, while emphasizing the elements of fear and attraction that determine aesthetic experience. The sublime was that which exuded exceptional qualities; it derived from pain in contrast to pleasure and was also linked to terror. (Sarfatti's depiction of Mussolini's ability to withstand extreme pain when

⁴¹ Ibid., 35.

⁴² Ibid., 39.

⁴³ Ibid., 86.

wounded at war and under surgery clearly suggests the sublimity of Mussolini's manly mastery.)

When Kant moved to write his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1763, he maintained Burke's dichotomized view and defined the sublime as arousing awe and admiration as opposed to the joy caused by the beautiful.⁴⁴ For Kant, the sublime was tied to moral experience, the principle of virtuous life; the sublime "makes man conscious of his moral worth."⁴⁵ As for distinguishing the feeling of the sublime from that of the beautiful, Kant affirmed that the former "moves" at the view of mountain peaks and raging storms, the latter "charms" at the spectacle of flower-strewn meadows and valleys.⁴⁶ Kant then differentiated among terrifying, noble and splendid sublime and in the context of that discussion moved to examine the different aesthetic predispositions of the two sexes. He concluded that, while the woman is marked by the beautiful, the sublime stands out among the masculine qualities. The virtue of man is noble, that of the woman is beautiful. This means that "women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly. . . . Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation!. . . I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles."⁴⁷ Similar to Burke, Kant saw the feeling inspired by the beautiful as "a pleasant sensation but one that is joyous and smiling," while the sublime inspires "enjoyment but with horror."⁴⁸ To be sure, Kant distinguished among three different kinds of the sublime that clearly had different gradients of horror in them; nevertheless, the sublime was linked to tragedy as opposed to the beautiful, which instead drew from comedy.

If we take into account that for Kant virtue meant raising the feeling of humanity's beauty to a principle, we could relate Mussolini's self-conception as virtuous man to his aesthetic disposition towards the sublime. As a virtuous man, Mussolini sacrificed his personal exis-

⁴⁴ Kant believed that beauty is inherent in objects outside of the mind (although years later in the *Critique* he examined the faculties of the mind working together harmoniously to produce a feeling—aesthetic response would then rise from the inner life of the mind).

⁴⁵ Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

tence in the name of superior principles that elevated him above the mass. His exceptional qualities permitted him to overcome pain and hardships and to take upon himself the onerous task of endowing Italy with a glorious future. As he told Ludwig, "The interest in the populace is a dramatic thing. Since I serve it, I multiply my life." This sentence directly followed Ludwig's question on how Mussolini could reconcile the statement "I want to dramatize my life" with the affirmation "My higher goal is public interest."⁴⁹ Mussolini's aim was to create with no limits, in full autonomy, and in the exercise of an artistic will; he stood as an omnipotent manly creator who creates himself while also crafting his dramatic work of art out of feminine, inferior masses—a totalitarian dream.

According to Claude Lefort, at the heart of totalitarian politics lies the idea of creation where the world transformer, the artist-politician of the totalitarian state, founds a new society built upon the suppression of any internal division with the ultimate goal of producing a unitary whole.⁵⁰ The totalitarian ideal of a beautiful society requires eliminating all divisions in the name of unity; every single part needs to be sacrificed so that a state of harmony can be established for the unison of the whole. As the aesthetic principle of harmony ominously underlies the totalitarian leader's claims to power, any element that interrupts or limits the homogenization of the whole is considered unhealthy and disruptive. The aesthetic sublime promises order and accord.

In reality, as Lefort argues (following Machiavelli), the opposition between people and those in command is inevitable and irreducible; more importantly, conflict guarantees that power cannot be appropriated by any one person or group and will remain at stake in the confrontation between opposing sides. Any appeal to a harmonious society or any attempt to end social division necessarily leads to a totalizing collectivity, the kind of aesthetic state that eliminates difference. This is exactly what distinguishes totalitarianism from democracy, Lefort argues, and whether or not one agrees with Lefort's analysis, there is no denying that Mussolini understood totalitarianism and embraced

⁴⁹ Ludwig, *Colloqui*, 15–16.

⁵⁰ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, edited by John Thompson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

it in those terms. Mussolini first used the word “totalitarian” in a June 1925 speech, a few months after the formal launching of his fascist dictatorship.⁵¹ Although originally coined by the opposition to explain the new reality of fascism, which escaped existing categories of political discourse, once appropriated by Mussolini the term was made to coincide with fascistization: “[T]hat goal that is defined as our ferocious totalitarian will shall be pursued with even greater ferociousness: it will truly become the dominant thought and preoccupation of our activity. We want, finally, to fascistize the nation.”⁵²

Mussolini was very explicit about his totalitarian, artistic vision, and his model of fascism accords with Lefort’s description of totalitarianism as expressing the fantasy of the “People-as-One” inspired by the image of “Power-as-One.”⁵³ Mussolini’s ideal of fascism offers the prototype of that fantasy, including framing the enemy as a threat to the integrity of the body politic.⁵⁴ Intrinsic to the dream of total control and power, the figure of the enemy, who supposedly brings disruption to the dictator’s totalitarian project, implies the widening of the leader’s area of domination through territorial expansion and wars. Needless to say, colonial conflicts and World War II loom eerily in this scenario as the inevitable outcomes of Mussolini’s dream of omnipotence. The artist’s canvas could not find completion without more decisive strokes that evoked force and strength. The painting would be incomplete if not depicting the militarized body of the newly constructed and aesthetically shaped fascist man as envisioned by his wishful and dramatic creator, Benito Mussolini.

⁵¹ On the history of the term, see Jens Petersen, “La nascita del concetto di ‘Stato totalitario’ in Italia” in *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* vol. 1 (1975), 143–68.

⁵² Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXI, 362.

⁵³ Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*.

⁵⁴ On the role of the body in fascism’s totalitarianism, see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

*The Metapolitics of Despair:
Romania's Mystical Generation and
the Passions of Emil Cioran*

Introduction

Hannah Arendt once wrote about the difficulties of passing judgment on various biographies involved in the intellectual storms of the twentieth century. She was right: what appears to us today as crystal-clear choices were, especially during the interwar period, much more convoluted, maddeningly complex reactions to the crisis of liberalism and democracy in general. In the 1930s, French thinker Élie Halévy proclaimed the advent of what he called *l'ère des tyrannies*.¹

My idea of *metapolitics* draws on Peter Viereck's insightful book, published in 1941, with an afterword, actually a review, by Thomas Mann.² Viereck borrowed this concept from an open letter addressed to Richard Wagner by Constantin Frantz in 1878: "To be genuinely German, politics must soar to metapolitics. The latter is to commonplace pedestrian politics as metaphysics is to physics." For Viereck the concept expressed "more adequately than any existing dictionary term, the high flaunting mysticism welding the political, economic, and national philosophy of Wagner and Hitler into a unity very much of its own—and very German." For Viereck, metapolitics is "a semi-political

¹ Élie Halévy, *L'Ère des tyrannies. Études sur le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). The present chapter comprises significantly revised sections of the article I coauthored with Dan Pavel entitled "Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries: The Generation of Angst and Adventure Revisited," *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 402–38.

² Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics. The Roots of the Nazi Mind* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965).

ideology resulting from the intertwining of four distinct strands.” These four are “romanticism . . . the ‘science’ of racism; a vague economic socialism, protesting sometimes demagogically and sometimes sincerely against capitalist materialism; and the alleged supernatural and unconscious forces of Volk collectivity.”³ In this chapter I will engage with this conceptualization by discussing some of the dynamics within the young generation of Romanian intellectuals from the 1920s and 1930s with a focus on those who indulged in fascistic appetites, particularly the (post)totalitarian tribulations of E. M. Cioran.

It is hard to imagine another culture but the French where a massive book called *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français* would be an intensely discussed best-seller. Coordinated by Jacques Julliard and Michel Winock, the 1,258-pages volume, published by Seuil in 1996, includes entries on authors as diverse as Louis Althusser, Louis Aragon, Raymond Aron, Henri Barbusse, Jean Baudrillard, Samuel Beckett, Robert Brasillach, Albert Camus, Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, Cornelius Castoriadis, Guy Debord, Marguerite Duras, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, François Furet, René Girard, André Glucksmann, Milan Kundera, Le Corbusier, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Nizan, Nicos Poulantzas, Marcel Proust, David Rousset, Nathalie Sarraute, Jean-Paul Sartre, Victor Serge, Georges Sorel, Boris Souvarine, Tzvetan Todorov, Boris Vian, Simone Weil, Iannis Xenakis, and of course, Émile Zola.

Several authors born in Romania appear in this dictionary: Emil Cioran, Eugène Ionesco, Serge Moscovici, and Tristan Tzara. Cioran (1911–1995) was not only a masterful writer and a great *moraliste*, but also an intellectual who experienced and epitomized *les passions d’antan*: the thinker caught in an ideological maelstrom, attracted to the siren songs of redemptive political ideologies. The starting point for my examination of Cioran’s attraction to the ideological promises of the far-right in the 1930s is François Furet’s remark at a conference at Michigan State University in 1995. According to Furet, in the 1930s and 1940s, fascism and communism, the two dominant political passions of the twentieth century, had a future. Young Cioran was a proponent of a *sui generis* version of fascism as a revolutionary doctrine,

³ Ibid., 4.

a dramaturgy of absolute destruction and rebirth. He shared with German national Bolsheviks⁴ an admiration for Lenin, Mussolini, militarism, collectivism, masculine vigor, youth, as well as a deep contempt for the effete, allegedly degenerate bourgeois values (what he later referred to as *la superstition démocratique*). In 1937, he expressed this radical rejection of democracy at the time: “the right and the left build on the ruins of freedom.”⁵

Fascism and the Romanian Intelligentsia

Under Nicolae Ceaușescu, fascism was presented as an imported product, without home-grown roots. The only serious Marxist approach to Romanian fascism was represented by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu’s books *Sub trei dictaturi* (Under three dictatorships), *Curențe și tendințe în filosofia românească* (Currents and trends in Romanian philosophy) and *Problemele de bază ale României* (Romania’s basic questions).⁶ But even Pătrășcanu remained, to a great extent, prisoner of the Comintern-produced definition of fascism. Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, two official historians appointed by Ceaușescu to deal with the Iron Guard, did not go beyond the highly questionable postulate that the Guard was

⁴ Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 257–58.

⁵ Marta Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica: Studii de cultură românească* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2011), 267.

⁶ See Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* (Bucharest: 100+1 Gramar, 1996); Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Curențe și tendințe în filosofia românească* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1971); Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Problemele de bază ale României* (Bucharest: Editura Socec, 1945). See also Vladimir Tismaneanu, “From Arrogance to Irrelevance: The Avatars of Marxism in Romania,” in *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communist in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Raymond Taras (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 135–50. After 1945, Pătrășcanu became minister of justice and was involved in early communist repression. In 1948, he was arrested at Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s orders. He was accused of being a “Titoist.” For more details, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

nothing but a Nazi-sponsored terrorist organization with no genuine Romanian roots.⁷

Contrary to these views, the Legionary Movement was a mass political phenomenon able to inspire authentic commitments and long-term loyalties. As historian Constantin Iordachi judiciously pointed out, the Iron Guard was the outcome of a process through which “the Romantic tradition of messianic nationalism” molded “into the charismatic ideological matrix of fascism.”⁸ The simplistic rhetoric of the Ceaușescu regime created a fascination with the Guard’s mysterious past and a knee-jerk tendency to doubt critical opinions about the movement’s role in Romania’s history. Under the banner of national unity, the Romanian Communist Party, starting with 1960s, fostered a discursive and institutional space where indigenizing eschatologies converged with the Marxist-Leninist one. This historical phenomenon is yet to be fully confronted, not to mention deconstructed, in contemporary Romania.

The main features of Romanian fascism were: the uniqueness of its mysticism; the religious-political osmosis; the refusal of any paganism (therefore theologian Nichifor Crainic’s reservations about German National Socialism); intense spiritualism; the mystique of death and the cult of sacrifice; the ethno-religious revolution and exaltation of Orthodoxy; the organic collectivism; anti-Bolshevism and anticapitalism; anti-

⁷ See Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de Fier – organizație teroristă de tip fascist* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1970); Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Împotriva fascismului* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971); and Aurică Simion, *Regimul politic din România în perioada septembrie 1940–ianuarie 1941* (Cluj-Napoca, 1976). For a historiographical approach to the study of fascism during the communist regime in Romania see Adrian Cioflâncă, “A ‘Grammar of Exculpation’ in Communist Historiography: Distortion of the History of the Holocaust under Ceausescu,” *Romanian Journal of Political Science* vol. 2 (2004): 29–46.

⁸ Constantin Iordachi, “Fascism in Southeast Europe: A Comparison between Romania’s Legion of the Archangel Michael and Croatia’s Ustaša,” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans. Volume Two: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions*, ed. by Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 400. There is a growing literature on Romanian fascism. Iordachi’s comprehensive chapter contains an extensive literature review on East Central and Southeast European fascism, while also engaging with the main debates in the field. Also see Constantin Iordachi, ed., *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010).

semitism based on religious, political, and economic grounds; anti-parliamentarianism; the emphasis on irrationality; the militaristic structure and the search for the legionary New Man. The contrast between theory and practice was striking: the value of Christian love and compassion were contradicted by resort to violence and terrorism. The “structure of sentiments”⁹ revolved around despair over the suffocating status quo: this central theme appealed to all those who felt rejected, abandoned, or uprooted within Romania’s problematic democracy.

The Iron Guard was a movement of the mob that managed to appeal to the country’s anguished intellectual elite. One should also notice the presence of aristocrats within the movement and the visible presence of marginals (especially Romanian Macedonians) in the terrorist squads. Not unimportant was the role of Orthodox low-level clergy,¹⁰ theology students and country-side teachers.¹¹ In an interview published in 1972, Emil Cioran proposed a poignant although highly questionable analysis of the emotional underpinnings of the Iron Guard:

The Iron Guard, to which, by the way, I did not belong, was a very strange phenomenon. Its leader, Codreanu, was actually a Slav, rather like a Ukrainian hetman. Most of the Guard’s killers were uprooted Macedonians; the organization was above all an expression of Romania’s periphery. One says about cancer that it is not one disease, but a complex of diseases; the Iron Guard was a complex of movements, and more of a lunatic sect than a party. They talked less about national awakening than about the splendor of death. As a rule, the Romanians are skeptics, they do not expect much from their destiny. Therefore, the Guard was generally disdained by the intellectuals, but psychologically the situation was different. There was a kind of madness in this thoroughly fatalistic people. And the bored intellectuals with their diplomas of whom

⁹ Raymond William, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Mirel Bănică, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română: stat și societate în anii '30* (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

¹¹ Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

I have been speaking, who went to the dogs in the villages, naturally were glad to join. In a way, the Iron Guard was considered to be a remedy for all evil, including boredom, and even the clap.¹²

The truth is that the Iron Guard attracted more than the lunatic fringe. Cioran himself wrote for Guardist publications and advocated a nihilistic rebellion against liberalism and Reason. As for Nae Ionescu and Mircea Eliade (see below), one could hardly argue that they held the Guard in any form of contempt. Their fascist commitment was not occasional or opportunistic, but a consistent choice determined by their fascination with the *völkisch* community and the yearning for total immersion in radical experiences of salvation. Their endorsement of the Iron Guard was thus political and eschatological.¹³ In 1936, Cioran himself notoriously proclaimed in a book paradigmatic for the thirties that “Romania needs exaltation taken to fanaticism. . . . I can only love Romania in a delirium.”¹⁴

The “generation” of intellectuals who fell prey to the totalitarian temptations of the interwar period was not completely homogeneous either: it included as diverse figures as Jewish intellectuals Mihail Sebastian, Belu Zilber, and Ion Călugăru, in addition to the young modernist Eugène Ionesco, and Nae Ionescu’s students and admirers Mircea Vulcănescu, Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, and Emil Cioran. The political spectrum within this group comprised allegiances from radical left to radical right.¹⁵

¹² See François Bondy, “Gespräche mit... E.M. Cioran (Vienna, 1972),” quoted in Leon Volovici’s outstanding book, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1991), 148.

¹³ For a perceptive exploration of the relationship between Nae Ionescu’s circle and the Guard, see Matei Călinescu’s penetrating study, “Romania’s 1930s Revisited,” *Salmagundi* 97 (Winter 1993): 133–51.

¹⁴ Emil Cioran, *Schimbarea la față a României* (Bucharest: Huamnitas, 1993), 2nd ed., 42.

¹⁵ See Zigu Ornea, “Asociația ‘Criterion’,” *Dilema*, No. 20, May 28–June 3, 1993, 6. For the diversity of the Generation’s intellectual interests, it would be worth noting that at one of the symposia organized by the circle “Criterion,” communist intellectuals Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Belu Zilber were invited in 1932 to lecture on Lenin. For a general perspective on “Criterion,” see Mircea Eliade, *Memorii*, Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 266–303.

Generally speaking, these were bright intellectuals born in the early 1900s. They were marked by the horrific and equally exhilarating experience of World War I, but they were not part of the front generation. They quickly became disenchanted with the initial illusions about the Romanian state after its unification in 1918. As historian Lucian Boia remarked, this generation (in a broad sense and less as an age-group) had internalized the imperative of experimentation¹⁶ (social, political, cultural, or economic)—a cardinal feature of *fin de siècle* political modernism. For a long time, authors have employed the term “the 1927 generation,” but I believe that this phrase does not express the complexity of the cohort who became active during the late 1920s and increasingly radicalized in the 1930s and 1940s. In the present essay, I will employ it only when I refer to intellectuals who radicalized by embracing elements of local, Romanian fascism.

Why did they espouse the ideals of the Iron Guard? The answer should definitely be linked to their status as alienated intellectuals in search of a palpable vehicle for their Messianic expectations for national regeneration. Their conversion can be explained because of the following factors: the role of Nae Ionescu and his enormous psychological appeals (personal magnetism, role-model, charismatic power)¹⁷; the European intelligentsia’s widespread fascination with dictatorships and rejection of democracy; the need for social admiration and rise in social status; the attraction to power and the sentiment that within the revolutionary movement they would become important and significant; the search for a meaning to their lives; the rampant opportunism¹⁸ as described by Eugène Ionesco’s metaphor of “rhynocerization”:

University professors, students, intellectuals were turning Nazi, Iron Guards, one after the other. We were some fifteen people

¹⁶ Lucian Boia, *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 27.

¹⁷ Marta Petreu wonderfully analyzes Cioran’s fascination with Nae Ionescu in “Portretul învățătorului ca diavol” in her volume *De la Țunimea la Noica*, especially, 214–17 and 225–26.

¹⁸ Lucian Boia describes the opportunism among intellectuals at the University of Bucharest during the purges that began once the national-legionary state was proclaimed (September 1940; it lasted until February 1941). Boia, *Capcanele istoriei*, 158–96.

who used to get together, to discuss, to try to find arguments opposing theirs. It was not easy. . . . From time to time, one of our friends said: "I don't agree at all with them, to be sure, but on certain points, nevertheless, I must admit, for example, the Jews..." etc. And this was a symptom. Three weeks later, this man would become a Nazi. He was caught in the mechanism, he accepted everything, he became a rhinoceros. Toward the end, only three or four of us resisted.¹⁹

The fascist conversion of such intellectuals was also favored by political and philosophical fashions. The generation's antidemocratism was not necessarily one of ignorance or incompetence, but the result of informed choices. Like Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, or Martin Heidegger, these intellectuals saw capitalism as intrinsically alien to the organic formulae of life and ontological rootedness.²⁰ The times called for the dissolution of the individual into a heroic collective built on the rubble of a modernity pronounced defunct. Either from the left or from the right, the horrors of the twentieth century came about once "modernist revitalization movements"²¹ became full-fledged state programs of social engineering.

Back then, an obsessional theme was that Romania's destiny cannot be accomplished within democratic-parliamentary forms, but rather in the reconstituting of the original bonds of solidarity of the agrarian-pastoral world. Thus, Nae Ionescu's and Emil Cioran's mystical fantasies were the expression of a reactionary repudiation, in revolutionary forms, of the country's integration in the world capitalist system. Fear that Romania would lose its identity after 1918 as its minorities grew exponentially merged with a sentiment that the world had gone out of its track.

The generation of intellectuals Cioran was a member of partook in the expressionist sentiment of the end of the world. Those who would embrace fascism saw *Romanianism* as an apostolic mission, a way of

¹⁹ See Eugène Ionesco, *Antidotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 94–96, quoted by Matei Călinescu, "Romania's 1930s," 149.

²⁰ See Ian Buruma's splendid essay on Jünger, "The Anarch at Twilight," *The New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1993, 27–30.

²¹ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

exiting from parochialism and of discovering the country's imperial mission. This approach inspired the announcement of the "New Constantinople": Mircea Eliade's famous theme of "terror of history" and the fears of historical failure led to the exaltation of transhistorical forms of existence (mystical-ontological) that would save the nation from its peripheral condition. Outside history, in the pure experience of pre-rational forms of intersubjectivity, Romanians would achieve both significance and centrality.

Cioran longed for what historian Balázs Trencsényi called a "Münchausenian leap," that is "the 'creation of history' through sacred frenzy and apocalyptic prophetism."²² Such message transcended his and the generation's biographies, resurfacing in postcommunist quests for authenticity. The continuous rehabilitation of some of the themes of the "stalino-fascist baroque"²³ after 1989 as well as the constant fascination with the paligenetic ideas of local fascism can be explained by revealing the syncretic nature of the "Romanian ideology."²⁴ The latter

²² It should be underlined that Cioran, in contrast with Eliade, for instance, attempted "to reach the essence of Romanianness through negation," thus radically rejecting mainstream nationalist discourse. Balázs Trencsényi, *The Politics of "National Character": A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London: Routledge, 2012), 62, 63.

²³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *Stalinism for All Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). In *Fantasies of Salvation*, I employed the term in order to refer to "a new version of radicalism combining themes of left and right in a baroque, often unpredictable alchemy. Such parties, which exist in most of the postcommunist societies, share a number of political attributes: hostility to pluralism and diversity; cultivation of an idealized and self-congratulatory historical tradition; xenophobia and bigotry against minorities; a neoromantic, often irrational glorification of premodern, nonurban values; and strong reservations about, and often direct enmity toward, private property and the market." (41)

²⁴ I coined and described this concept along with historian Bogdan C. Iacob using as starting points Bernard-Henri Lévy, *L'idéologie française* (Paris: Éditions Grasset, 1981) and George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, with a new preface by the author (New York: Schocken Books, 1981). For details, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, "The Romanian Ideology. Merging Political Extremes in a National Stalinist Discourse," in *Underground Streams*, ed. by János Rainer (New York/Budapest: CEU Press, forthcoming).

construct is the result of a gradual but extensive symbiosis of traditions of cultural narcissism and ethnocentrism with the Ceaușescu regime's odd synthesis of isolationism (especially during the 1980s) and pericentrism²⁵ (particularly from the 1960s well into the late 1970s).

Unsurprisingly, throughout the 1990s in Romania, a triangular model operated with three variables (psychological, axiological, and structural-political): "the 1927 generation," the Mentor; the Guard. The most important elements of these elements can be explored through the texts particularly important for our topic: Nae Ionescu's 1934 antisemitic "Preface" to Mihail Sebastian's novel *De două mii de ani* and young Emil Cioran's 1936 essay *Schimbarea la față a României*. Reprinted by Humanitas publishing house in 1990, these texts had a lasting influence over cultural debates in Romania. The late Cioran tried to mitigate the intoxication of the new revolutionary mystics with his bombastic and chauvinist rhetoric by sanitizing the new edition of *Schimbarea la față*: he deleted the most embarrassing passages. He bluntly labeled these passages as "pretentious and stupid."²⁶ They would only fuel the growing xenophobic flames that burned in Romania's early postcommunist society.

The Importance of Revisiting the "Generation"

Isaiah Berlin wrote in his essay on nationalism that "no political movement today, at any rate outside the Western world, seems likely to succeed unless it allies itself to national sentiment."²⁷ The peculiarity of the "1927 generation" was that, while incorporating such emotions,

²⁵ According to political scientist Tony Smith, during the Cold War, "junior actors [in our case Nicolae Ceaușescu] may have interests, passions, and types of leaders wanting to take advantage of what they perceive to be an international contest to give shape to domestic, or regional, or even global organizations of power that they conceive of in their own nationalist or ideological terms." Tony Smith, "New Bottled for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall, 2000): 591.

²⁶ Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evereului în cultura română*, 3rd ed. (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012), 29.

²⁷ See Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1980), 355.

it made nationalism a supra-political concept, endowing it with a religious and mystical virtue, rather than an ethical and political one. The case of Mircea Eliade, widely considered the “head of the 1927 generation,” and by all means its most prolific writer clearly demonstrates this attempt to endow nationalism with religious-mythical virtues.²⁸ Writing in 1927, Eliade defined the mission of the generation in contrast to its predecessors (usually seen as pro-Western, soft-hearted rationalists and democrats). In his view, after the previous generation had fulfilled its task in reunifying the country in the form of Great Romania (after World War I), his generation appeared as the first one stripped of the burden of a precise political mission. For him, the release from these political constraints was the chance to engage in cultural creation per se.

For this generation, from Eliade in 1927 to Noica in 1987, truth could exist outside politics and morality. The consequence of this separation was that the intellectuals who belonged to it skillfully avoided the essential problem of intellectual responsibility. Though belatedly, Cioran broke this pattern with his volumes *La tentation d'exister* (1956) and *Histoire et utopie* (1960). There were two famous exceptions: Mihail Sebastian and Eugène Ionesco. They had never belonged to the inner circle of Nae Ionescu's mystical performances. As a Jew and a rationalist, Sebastian witnessed with horror and anguish the spectacle of the Guardist conversion of his best friends. His 1935 memoir *Cum am devenit huligan* (How I became a hooligan) is one of the finest dissections of the European intelligentsia's capitulation to the totalitarianisms of the left and the right.

Cioran's book *Histoire et utopie* begins with a confessional essay: “On Two Types of Society: Letter to a Faraway Friend.” The friend was Constantin Noica, author of a manuscript on Hegel's phenomenology (“Stories about Man”). After the publication of Cioran's text in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (1957), several Romanian intellectuals transcribed and translated it and then circulated it in Bucharest. According to one of them, they had found the “letter” at the Academy's library, which received the French magazine. This action would be invoked in 1960 by the communist authorities in the trial that they engineered against Noica and the intellectuals they more or less arbitrarily grouped

²⁸ Florin Ţurcanu, *Mircea Eliade. Prizonierul istoriei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006).

as his “circle.” In spite of the fact that Cioran perceived the document as the departure from his infamous fascist past, the secret police used it to substantiate the accusation that the people circulating it had disseminated legionary propaganda.²⁹

The “Letter” was Cioran’s first explicit and unequivocal break with his early infatuation with fascism. The neoromantic worshiping of the charismatic dictators was replaced by a stoical acceptance of democracy. Symptomatically, he did not discuss his fascination with Hitler, with Italian fascist doctrinaire Julius Evola, and a number of other long occulted episodes (i.e., his broadcasting during the Iron Guard rebellion in January 1941 of a text in favor of radical violence).

I need to emphasize here the different destinies of two outstanding members of the 1927 generation: Cioran and Noica. Both were fascinated with the Mephistophelian personality of Nae Ionescu (the prototype for Eugène Ionesco’s character “The Logician” in *The Rhinoceros*), and both turned into Iron Guard ideologues. After World War II, Cioran became a major French intellectual. Noica remained in Romania, was the target of the communist regime’s besmirching campaigns, was arrested in 1958, and spent six years in prison. He was released in 1964, became a researcher in logic and a major philosopher of culture with an overwhelming impact on younger Romanian intellectuals including Gabriel Liiceanu, Andrei Pleșu, Andrei Cornea, and Sorin Vieru.

Romania’s imperfect early twentieth century, with its cosmopolitan salons and liberal political class, did in fact come to an end after 1940. Some members of the 1927 generation left the country; others stayed and suffered the hardships of a Stalinist regime that preserved its essence by nationalizing itself. The two most celebrated to have remained in Romania and survived were Petre Țuțea and Constantin Noica. Unlike the case of Jan Patočka, the Czech philosopher, neither Țuțea nor Noica enrolled in any dissident actions. They thus established a behavioral pattern of “survival through culture,”³⁰ a model that was emulated by

²⁹ For details on his affair, see Stelian Tănase, *Anatomia mistificării*, 2nd ed. (București: Humanitas, 2003), 90–112.

³⁰ Historian Cristian Vasile convincingly examined the fate of this conceptualization of cultural life during communism in post-1989 historiography in his *Viața intelectuală și artistică în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015).

their followers. The issue was not to protest the regime, but to use every loophole for the preservation of cultural value. When they protested (not Noica, but some of his younger students), they did it in a deliberately non-political context: their agenda was linked to the limitation on the functioning of the Writers' Union, not the destruction of Romania's overall civilization by a paranoid dictator. To the sound and fury of Bucharest's allegedly frivolous life, Noica opposed the model of self-exile, which in reality was a way of placing himself not outside of, but above, on-going debates. It was an officially tolerated alternative space for debates. The participants, all revolving around Noica, struggled to liberate themselves from the dominant rhetoric.³¹

The 1927 generation was convinced that ideas do not communicate with the vulgar world of everyday politics. This vision was rooted in Nae Ionescu's thought and his worshipping of vital instinct and sheer action, regardless of consequences.³² This explains the striking absence, among a group of proto-existentialist philosophers, of any serious, thorough-going approach to the country's social, economic, and political problems and their unabashed skepticism about the value of Western individualism suspected of faintheartedness, crass materialism, cynical philanthropy, and boundless hypocrisy. To say that the 1927 generation was altogether nihilistic would be an error: they denied the values of capitalism and proposed instead the spirituality of mysticism (either neo-Byzantine or even Indian). As noted literary historian Zigu Ornea wrote, this generation broke not only with the historical legacy of its forerunners, "but also [with] its corollary, rationalism, the myth of progress, the belief in the absolute role of science and industry."³³

This Romanian intellectual adventure was part of a pan-European attempt to redefine the value of existence outside science and positivism through the rediscovery of the unconscious, myth, oracular philosophy, and collective passions. Especially in conditions of political cri-

³¹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991)

³² Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci. Extrema dreaptă românească* (Bucharest: Samuel Tastet Éditeur, 2008).

³³ Zigu Ornea, "Memoriile lui Eliade," *România literară* 5 (February 20–26, 1992): 11.

sis, against the background of social dissolution, when all values seem evanescent, provisional, or questionable, intellectuals tend to look for absolutes in the realm of the irrational experience and accept crackpots as genuine prophets. Despising the parvenu mentality of the political class accused of “politicking and lack of patriotism,” abhorring its petty arrangements, and dreaming of an apocalyptic national purification, the 1927 generation was ready to welcome any mass movement that would put an end to what they perceived as the parliamentary circus. Their heart was ready to beat for the would-be martyrs of national redemption. Blinded by their existentialist obsessions, people like Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Constantin Noica renounced their minimal skepticism when it came to applauding and endorsing the *Căpitan* (Captain, that is, the leader of the Iron Guard, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu).³⁴ Cioran’s fascination with Codreanu was at its most blatant in November 1940 when he proclaimed that “in a country of servants, he [CZC] brought honor, and in a flock without vertebrae, [he brought] pride.”³⁵ Criminal endeavors were seen as regenerative rites. Cioran and his friends aimed to radically challenge the existing Romania in the name of a mythical one.

Cioran did not approach tradition in a conservative way. The emphasis was on the break with the past and the leap into the future. The Iron Guard’s goal was to produce an anthropological revolution, to generate the New Man. The future fascist was to become “part of a new international order dominated by the new chosen people,” who would reach “the end of history through the resurrection and salvation of humanity.”³⁶ Nae Ionescu, the mentor of this group, initially admired Mussolini, but once Hitler came to power, increasingly switched his support to the German dictator. He found Hitler’s radical and social revolution a more attractive example of radical anticapitalist rebellion.³⁷ In their search for authenticity, for another Romania, different from the pseudo-one, these people shared the idiosyncrasies of the European

³⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea “Căpitanului”* (Buharest: Huamnitas, 2017).

³⁵ Quoted in Boia, *Capcanele istoriei*, 163.

³⁶ Iordachi, “Fascism in Southeast Europe,” 419.

³⁷ See Nae Ionescu, *Roza vînturilor* and his preface to Mihail Sebastian’s *De două mii de ani*, one of the most outrageous rationalizations of religious antisemitism.

“front generation” in that they let themselves be completely absorbed by “their desire to see the ruin of this whole world of fake security, fake culture, and fake life.”³⁸ In this reading, for Cioran, fascism was *the* revolution: it had to simultaneously generate ontological and social renewal.

Cioran's Biographical Meanderings

Cioran's entry into the Romanian cultural scene in the 1930s was explosive, fateful, and tempestuous. Symptomatically to his times, the young philosopher abhorred bourgeois values, worshipped Stirner, Dostoyevsky, Moeller van den Bruck, Spengler, Klages. He sided with *die Seele* (the soul) in its competition with *der Geist* (the spirit). The same intellectual appetites were detailed by Marta Petreu for the case of the young Mihail Sebastian. Petreu showed how for seven years (1926–1933), the Romanian-Jewish writer was a promoter of Mussolini's ideas in the pages of the newspaper *Cuvântul* directed by the nefarious Nae Ionescu.³⁹

As a desperate young intellectual, stifled by the parochialism of his country's dominant culture, Cioran admired the Iron Guard, Europe's third largest fascistic movement, and savagely attacked liberal democratic values. In his early Romanian writings, which he later repudiated as delirious and fanatic, he tried to formulate the guidelines for a Romanian “national revolution.” In a self-critical confession, titled “Mon pays,” written in 1949 and published posthumously in 1996, Cioran addressed his early romance with the Guard:

We were a band of desperate individuals in the heart of the Balkans. And we were doomed to fail; our failure was our only excuse. . . . [The Iron Guard] was the only sign that our country could be anything but a fiction. It was a cruel movement, a mixture of prehistory and prophecy, mystique of prayer and of revolt. And it was persecuted by all authorities, and it wanted to be per-

³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1973), 328.

³⁹ Marta Petreu, *Diavolul și ucenicul său: Nae Ionescu–Mihail Sebastian* (Iași: Polirom, 2009).

secuted. It had been founded on ferocious ideas: it disappeared ferociously. Whoever between 20 and 30 does not subscribe to fanaticism, to rage, to madness is an imbecile. One is a *liberal* only by fatigue, and a democrat by reason.⁴⁰

As I have shown above, young Cioran's attitude was hardly exceptional. One could bring up as example here the case that of "Beta, the disappointed lover," the epitome of antiliberal Polish intellectuals discussed by Czesław Miłosz in the *Captive Mind*:

none of these young people believed any longer in democracy. Most of the countries of Eastern Europe had been semi-dictatorships before the War; and the parliamentary system seemed to belong to a dead era. . . . This lack of any sort of vision led him to see the world a place in which nothing existed outside of naked force. It was a world of decline and fall. And the liberals of the older generation mouthing nineteenth-century phrases about respect for man—while all about them hundreds of thousands of people were being massacred—were fossil remains.⁴¹

As inferred earlier, Mihail Sebastian's trajectory epitomizes this dramatic and often traumatic situation. Born Iosif Hechter, in 1907 in the Danubian port of Brăila, Sebastian yearned all his life to be accepted by his peers as a genuine Romanian intellectual. He desperately tried to become a Jewish-Romanian writer in a country where the far right zealots (but also some mainstream politicians) emphatically questioned the "Romanianness" of all those who were not Christian Orthodox. Sebastian fell in love with Nae Ionescu and served (between 1927 and 1934) as an editor for *Cuvântul* (The word), a newspaper led by Ionescu. This affiliation lasted even after the paper (and its director) got closer to the Iron Guard, the mystical revolutionary movement that called for the cleansing of Romania of foreigners ("vermin") and liberal "rottenness."

⁴⁰ E.M. Cioran, "Mon pays," cited in Alain Finkielkraut, "Cioran mort et son jure," *Le Messenger Européen*, no. 9 (1996): 66–67.

⁴¹ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 112–13.

Hitler's coming to power radicalized all political factions in Romania. As a testament to his torments and tribulations, Sebastian published the novel *For Two Thousand Years* (1934) highlighting the main dilemmas of a Romanian-Jewish intellectual caught in the epoch's crucial debates. He asked Nae Ionescu to write the foreword. The professor did and what resulted was an egregiously antisemitic text, based on timeworn theological dogmas. Attacked from left, liberal, and Jewish circles for having accepted Ionescu's toxic preface, a wounded Sebastian responded in 1935 with a passionate pamphlet, *How I Became a Hooligan*. The text rejected all forms of intolerance and equated fascism and communism as equally inimical to individual freedom. In that poignant volume as well as in other subsequent writings, he strove to present himself as a pristine democrat and defended his collaboration with Ionescu at *Cuvântul*. During World War II, a victim of ignominious persecution, Sebastian kept a diary which was published in the 1990s to international acclaim, being often compared to Victor Klemperer's *I Will Bear Witness*. He died in 1945 after being run over by a truck. One of his prewar novels carried the prescient title *The Accident*.

Sebastian's democratic statements notwithstanding, he remained spellbound by this fascist magician. Nae Ionescu died in 1940, but his image continued to haunt Sebastian's dreams during the Holocaust's terror. Following Marta Petreu's argument, Sebastian's youth was imbued with fascist propensities which he later concealed rather than self-critically reveal. In my view, it was a rather ironical way of condemning this catastrophic trend. Furthermore, while it is true that Sebastian had lots of admiring things to say about Mussolini's fascist state, it is also important to remember that, until 1938, Italian fascism was not racist and some Jews (including Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky) had praised some of the duce's policies. Historian R. J. B. Bosworth noted that there were five Jews at Piazza San Sepolcro among which three were "martyrs" to the party cause before 1922. There were also 230 Jews officially listed to have participated in the March of Rome. He remarked that "by the 1930s it is estimated that about a quarter of Italy's adult Jews belong to the PNF [National Fascist Party in Italy], well above the average membership of some 10% of Italians."⁴²

⁴² R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy. Life under the Fascist Dictatorship 1915–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 415.

In order to understand the positions adopted by Cioran and Sebastian, it is quite appropriate to look back to the way they were ready to become apologists, in the 1920s and the 1930s, for what turned out to be incarnations of diabolical nihilism—what Hannah Arendt later identified as *radical evil*.⁴³ In June 1934, Cioran was in Germany and witnessed what entered history as the “Night of the Long Knives,” the liquidation of the ruling phalanx of the SA and the assassination of Ernst Röhm. Far from being disturbed or outraged, Cioran exalted the purifying effects of Hitler’s criminal treatment of his former comrades. He sent a jubilant reportage to the Romanian weekly *Vremea*, of which he was official correspondent at that time, a follow-up to his previous sympathetic analysis of the Nazi doctrine. The text was entitled: “Impressions from Munich. Hitler in the German Consciousness.”

A strong response to Cioran’s text came from the communist writer Alexandru Sahia, himself an ascetic revolutionary who had previously embraced a monastic career and who in 1934 was one of the chief apologists for Stalin’s USSR in Romania.⁴⁴ Sahia’s reply was entitled “A Case of Macabre Mystification: Mr. Cioran and the ‘Nice’ Hitler” and included passages such as these:

About a year ago, a blond and skinny young man left to study in Germany. . . . I still have in mind his youthful image, somewhat melodic, his looks lost towards the walls or the sky. He appeared to many as a man of purest sensibility and all his sentences and gestures had a special resonance, leaving a painfully indelible mark in his white soul. We speak here about Mr. Emil Cioran, a young man from Transylvania and the grandson of an Orthodox Metropolitan. Mr. Cioran experienced together with the citizens of Munich the moment of horror and smelled unwillingly—in the century of civilization—the blood of so many people, assassinated by their supreme leader. . . . I re-read his article many

⁴³ Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kern (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1994).

⁴⁴ Angelo Mitchievici’s book *Shadows of Paradise* documents extensively Sahia’s political and moral blindness: See *Umbrele paradisului. Scriitori români și francezi în Uniunea Sovietică* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012).

times. I gave it to others to read it. It is astounding. I have never met, after the racist mayhem—in the whole world—a single line alike those in this text. Not even the far right media . . . published similar impressions to those printed in *Vremea*.

Sahia quoted Cioran's statements written as a response to the massacres in Munich: "There is no political personality in today's world that inspires in me greater respect and admiration than Hitler. Even those who consider themselves Hitler's passionate adversaries, those who claim that they hate him are in reality caught in the waves of this mystique, which turned Hitler's personality into a myth."⁴⁵

Cioran's descent into totalitarian temptation continued in 1936 when he published the book *Cartea amăgirilor* (The book of illusions). At the time, Mihail Sebastian responded with a critical review in which he lamented the philosopher's abandoning of any trace of critical reason: "*Cartea amăgirilor* is a delirious book. Mr. Cioran himself is a writer in delirium, who loves his delirium, nourishes, maintains it, and stimulates it. He is a man who not only experiences a fever, but he is also proud of this fever. Fever for Mr. Cioran is a way to contemplate and understand the world. Fever, for him, is a program, a philosophy, and metaphysics."⁴⁶ These two examples reveal Cioran's full immersion in extremism, his enthusiastic embrace of the radical right's millenarian vision of national salvation.

Two decades later, in 1957, when his "Letter to a faraway friend" came out in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Cioran was reflecting sardonically on the antiparliamentarian follies of his frantically rebellious youth:

That political parties could confront each other without reciprocal annihilation was beyond my possibilities of understanding. A shame for the species, a symbol of a disembodied humanity, without passions or convictions, impervious to the absolute, devoid of future, unable to raise itself to that deep wisdom which taught me that the object of a discussion is the suppression of the opponent—this is the way I regarded the parliamentary regime.

⁴⁵ Sahia quoted in Marin Diaconu, *Pro și contra Emil Cioran. Între idolatrie și pamflet* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 16–17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

On the contrary, the systems which wanted to eliminate in order to become its substitute, struck me as *beautiful* without exception, attuned to movements of Life, my divinity of those days. I do not know whether to admire or to despise, to consider a saint or a corpse the person who, at the age of thirty, did not experience the fascination of all forms of extremism. In the absence of biological resources, hasn't this person either above or underneath time? A positive or negative deficiency, does it really matter?⁴⁷

And further:

When exiting adolescence, one is by definition a fanatic: this was my case as well, to the point of the ridicule. Do you remember the times when I was haranguing incendiary phrases, less because of an attraction to the outrageous, but rather as a need to overcome a fever which, without the escape via verbal madness, would have finally finished me? Was my project condemnable? It simply spelled out what any man attached to his country desires deep in his heart: the suppression of half of his fellow countrymen.⁴⁸ It was this *revolutionary delirium* that Cioran came to deeply regret in later years, primarily as a result of personal moral shocks during World War II—for instance the deportation and death of his friend Benjamin Fondane at Auschwitz. Subsequently, as Marta Petreu emphasized, Cioran “was forever troubled and mindful about anything that would offend Jewishness or would trigger antisemitism.”⁴⁹ He broke with fascism in 1941, though the *public* repudiation of his engagement with the Iron Guard remained elusive—it can only be reconstructed on the basis of his personal papers.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Laurence Tacou et Vincent Piednoir, eds., *Cahier de L'Herne no. 90 : Cioran* (Paris: Éditions de L'Herne, 2011), 11–12. Quotations translated into English by Vladimir Tismaneanu.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁹ Petreu, *De la Junimea la Noica*, 332.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 456–57. Petreu argues that Cioran's reservations toward publicly and radically denouncing with his fascist past were rooted in his fear of becoming the victim of, simultaneously, the democratic press in France and of the Iron Guard in the diaspora, who “would take revenge in *their own way*” [original emphasis]. Ibid., 466.

We do not know what Cioran and poet Paul Celan talked about during their promenades in the Jardin du Luxembourg in postwar Paris. We know that they shared a profound distrust of history and an infinite skepticism regarding apocalyptic politics, metapolitics, and political religions. The origins of the fanaticism of his youth, wrote Cioran, were to be detected in a “bestial sadness which, concealed beneath the mask of fervor, unfolded at my expense, and of which I was nevertheless an accomplice, delighted not to have, like so many others, a choice between the bland and the atrocious.”⁵¹

Cioran lived under the sign of utopia, of dilemmas about identity, and political neurosis. Born in Rășinari (near Sibiu in Transylvania) in 1911, he was a passionate intellectual, therefore one who was anguished, burning, and full of uncertainties. He deplored any shallow schematism, any frozen philosophical formula, and he doubted everything including his own self. Cioran lived under the cloud of desperation, an impossible bet with a hidden, if absent, God—an erratic, jealous, sometimes bilious demiurge to whom he obstinately threw down the gauntlet of feverish contempt. He was infatuated with nothingness, and he felt good only in that desert of conquering melancholia to which we ascribe the name of brilliant inadequacy or that always-be-against call: Emil without a country, Emil without a home (*Heimatlosigkeit*). In short, Cioran was the grand vagabond of an ailing metaphysics. Some called him a *nihilist*. I do not think we can talk about denying values, but rather a supreme, burdening, and terrorizing disappointment. For him the world appeared crooked, we are always dependent on obligations and decisions which proved many times unfortunate, even disastrous.

In his youth, as he confessed, Cioran was contaminated with the virus of utopian radicalism. He was, to use Czesław Miłosz’s words, “a slave of history.” In other words, he was an intellectual attracted by the prophetic promises of fascism, and he could have taken any path, including communism since he admired Lenin. The bourgeois mediocrity inherent in the turbulent 1930s, that low and dishonest decade to paraphrase W. H. Auden, and the complacency of a fallible—but

⁵¹ Tacou and Piedmont, eds., *Cahier de L’Herne* no. 90, 13–14.

real—democracy bedeviled him.⁵² He wished for another country, a totally new non-philistine Romania, a homeland capable of mortal leaps, frenzy, authenticity, and imperial adventures. In his own words, he was infatuated with the will “to force ourselves into history, to incite at all costs something new.”⁵³

After the shock of World War II, the Holocaust, and after his public break with Noica, he developed a significant, once-absent skepticism toward all ideological siren songs. In a text marked by unique sincerity, that heartbreaking confession titled *Mon Pays*, Cioran asserted more hard truths about his juvenile blindness than most of his opponents together. It was published posthumously in 1996 by Simone Boué, who had discovered the manuscript, probably written before 1960, in a brown envelope.

Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston vividly described the picture that Cioran drew for himself in *Mon Pays*. She pointed to the emphasis on “his Dostoyevskian streak, his fondness for suffering.” Nevertheless, “the ‘wild madman’” of the youth “is subdued in this portrait by a sense of estrangement.” His country had offered him, to use Cioran’s words, “a marvelous occasion for torment.”⁵⁴ A telling characterization of Cioran’s state of mind during the postwar period came from Petru Comarnescu, his former colleague at *Criterion*, the intellectual circle that brought together the 1927 generation before its descent in totalitarian temptation. In a report to the communist secret police in 1966, Comarnescu (who remained in Romania and suffered systematic marginalization until the early 1960s) described Cioran as “a man with strange reactions typical of a lonely person, isolated, who indulges in his suffering, deprivations, poverty, and who is able to forbid himself the joy of seeing his family and country.”⁵⁵

⁵² For a detailed political history of Romania between 1930 and 1940, see Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismul în România 1930–1940* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004).

⁵³ Quoted in Boia, *Capcanele istoriei*, 22.

⁵⁴ Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, *Searching for Cioran*, edited by Kenneth R. Johnston, foreword by Matei Calinescu (Bloomington IN.: Indiana University Press, 2009), 96–97.

⁵⁵ *Dosarele secrete ale agentului Anton. Petru Comarnescu în arhivele Securității*, selection, introduction, and comments by Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 277.

However, in the interwar period, at a time when the democratic Romania was in a desperate need for friends and not foes, he chose to abhor his country—a thing that he would come to regret for the remainder of his life. He answered the call of apocalyptic existentialism. But paradoxically, he was a crusader in love with the conservative tradition. I once called him a “mystical revolutionary,” a syndrome strikingly similar to what historian Jeffrey Herf called “reactionary modernism.”⁵⁶ For Cioran, the repudiated past was to be replaced by a new national mythology: “the only salvation is the fever of modernization rejecting ruralist-nostalgic discourse.” In this sense, his cultural regeneration was founded on a paradox: “universality can only be reached by exclusivity, for universalism *per se* means decadence.”⁵⁷ I remember the talks I had with Matei Călinescu (professor of comparative literature, until his death in 2009, at Indiana University in Bloomington) on the generation of Cioran as part of a European phenomenon marked by both exasperated rejection and audacious assumption of modernity. Unsurprisingly, as mentioned earlier, in his classic essay on “Joseph de Maistre and the origins of fascism,” Isaiah Berlin quoted Cioran encomiastically.⁵⁸

In contrast with *Schimbarea la față a României*, a telltale manifesto for the ideological fever in interwar Romania, the older Cioran protested against all forms of xenophobia. His pages on Jews in *La tentation d'exister* represent a homage of immense warmth, I would even say love, for a nation of hermits and martyrs. In like manner, what he wrote on Hungarians and what he pronounced in his dialogues with friends such as François Fejtő should be taught in Romanian schools to overcome the primitive visions still hindering sincere and honest analyses of the recent past. Cioran's intellectual and biographical meanderings underline the imperative that exegetes be careful about relying on apodictic and ready-made verdicts in an age when liberal democracy seems to be rapidly fading, while totalitarian temptations,

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Trencsényi, *The Politics “National Character”*, 63.

⁵⁸ See Sir Isaiah Berlin's masterful study “Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism,” in his book *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 91–174 and E. M. Cioran, “Joseph de Maistre: An Essay on Reactionary Thought,” in *Anathemas and Admirations* (New York: Arcade Publishing/Little Brown, 1991).

projects for the etatization of metapolitics, appears to be the future for equally the elites and the masses.

I believe that a key to understanding such radical passions is to be found in a text written by Paul Nizan in 1934. There the French philosopher compared André Malraux and Martin Heidegger. At the time, the former was a star of the pro-Soviet, antifascist French left, while the latter had already accepted to become the rector of the University of Freiburg with Nazi endorsement. Malraux's speeches sounded shockingly similar to Heidegger's discourse as rector. The German philosopher exalted "the historical grandeur of Nazism," while the French, the one of Bolshevism. Nizan observed that the works of Malraux and Heidegger (and I would add Cioran's early writings to this short list) were imbued with anxiety and desperation.

Nizan himself was then a communist critic, an intellectual highly praised by his former colleagues at École Normale Supérieure, Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron. He would later break with the Stalinist left after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. He died on the front, in 1940, at the age of thirty-five, disgusted by so many infamies, surrenders, and betrayals. Returning to his 1934 text, Malraux reminded Nizan of

that great thinker and contemporary philosopher, Martin Heidegger, for whom, as well as for Malraux, the essence of human life lies in anxiety and desperation. Such adjacency is extremely symptomatic of the current historical period. At this hour of decline of the bourgeois civilization, some great thinkers had suddenly discovered that in the face of the abyss, anxiety and desperation represent a reality for man. . . . To the fundamental question, "How can one escape angst and death?" the two offer different answers. Heidegger has found an answer in the total and unconditioned acceptance of National Socialism. Malraux, in his turn, has tried to defeat this angst. He has found in action, any kind of action, the strength to overcome or at least ignore it. Action can protect the individual against desperation and anxiety . . . it is the supreme form of revolutionary bravery."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Curtis Cate, *André Malraux: A Biography* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1995), 202.

Nizan's words superbly depict the political and existential anxiety of the 1920s and 1930s that fuelled the ideological extremisms which brought about the destruction, dehumanization, and mass annihilation of the twentieth century.

Unlike Georg Lukács, who remained until the end faithful to his Leninist bet, Cioran understood that he had been wrong. He confronted, maybe not as publicly as he should have, his infamous past. Unlike Lukács or Carl Schmitt, he made peace with the values of democratic liberalism. He carried his cross with dignity, agonized, and went through the mill. He sublimated such personal torturous history into those "syllogisms of bitterness" without which our world would be more absurd and bleak. In his helplessness lies the dawn of a new possible redemption. Of all his books, in *Histoire et Utopie* one can see the beginning of his making sense of dictatorship: "A world without tyrants would resemble a zoo without hyenas."⁶⁰ Of the French philosophers, I would rather compare him with figures such as Vladimir Jankélévitch or Emmanuel Levinas.

In a dialogue with historian Ferenc Fejtő, Cioran made a terrific analysis of fascism and communism:

It was a cascade of barbarian spasms. It was a completely demented idea to want to establish a universal empire based on the Nazi idea of *Herrenvolk* as Hitler imagined. The extraordinary ability of the communists was precisely to wish the establishment of world domination based on the egalitarian idea. It is an expression of genius and it exerts fascination even to the last of the barbarians. No one can rule the world by proclaiming that everybody is inferior. The fact that Hitler could carry Germany into suicide, a country on the heights of European civilization, proves the insane and diabolical component of the Hitlerian idea.⁶¹

By way of his biography and as he got disenchanted with salvationism, Cioran understood that fascism and communism belonged, despite their essential differences, to the same political genus. Both

⁶⁰ See E.M. Cioran, *Histoire et utopie* (Paris: Folio, 1987).

⁶¹ "On Revolution and History": dialogue between E.M. Cioran and François Fejtő, published in *AGORA*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1990): 150.

were revolutionary ideologies that aimed to destroy the status quo (that is, the bourgeois order) and its values. These movements proclaimed the leading role of a community of chosen individuals grouped within the party. Both detested bourgeois values and liberal democracy. One carried to an extreme a certain Enlightenment universalism, the other made an absolute of racial particularism. Fascism and communism equally put themselves in position to “blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history.”⁶² Young Emil Cioran himself wrote and descended in this ideological quagmire that aimed to demolish the past in the name of the future. Later, he reinvented himself, abandoned the early delirium, though without giving up his desperation regarding the meaninglessness of human existence. He made peace with liberalism and scathingly rejected any form of tribalism, nationalism, or xenophobia. In the end, Cioran rejected redemptive mythologies by embracing tragic humanism.

⁶² The formulation belongs to Walter Benjamin, quoted by Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 223.

MICHAEL SCAMMELL

*Arthur Koestler and the Temptations
of Utopianism*

If the idea of utopia has not been extinguished either in politics or religion, it is because it responds to a profound need rooted in man. There is in the conscience of man a restlessness that no reform and no material well-being can satisfy. The history of utopia is therefore the history of a hope that is always deluded, but a tenacious hope. No rational criticism can uproot it, and it is important to recognize it even under different connotations.

—Ignazio Silone

Arthur Koestler is best known for his writings as a militant anticommunist and leading figure in the cultural Cold War, and as the author of *Darkness at Noon*, one of the earliest and most celebrated works of fiction to identify and analyze the mechanism of Stalin's show trials and to explain why the Revolution was eating its own children. Koestler's analysis rested on his personal experiences of communism, fed by the utopian dreams of his youth, and they will be the main topic of this paper. I would however, like to remind the reader that in a long life, Koestler published over thirty books, including six novels, four autobiographies, four essay collections, three current affairs commentaries, six works of scientific speculation, and two on para-science. The subjects that he tackled ranged from history to politics, religion, capital punishment, astronomy, creativity, biology, neurobiology, psychology, and parapsychology, to name only the most obvious. I mention them here because I wish to underline that Koestler's utopianism did not begin and end with communism, and that, contrary to the popular

view, his famous renunciation of cold war politics in 1955 did not put an end to his utopian dreams. What it signaled, rather, was their modification and diversion into new channels, which I will deal with briefly in the last part of this paper.

Ideologies

The word “utopia” shows up rarely in Koestler’s writings, but one of its most significant uses occurs in the first volume of his autobiography, *Arrow in the Blue*, where he acknowledges that from an early age he experienced a yearning for happiness that resulted in utopian dreams. His condition was undoubtedly influenced by a lonely and unhappy childhood, a sense of rootlessness derived from the family’s constant moving from place to place, and an inferiority complex. Their impact on his psychology crystallized his utopian cast of mind in a semi-mystical episode he experienced at the age of fourteen and described in the first volume of his autobiography, *Arrow in the Blue*.

I was lying on my back under a blue sky on a hill slope in Buda. My eyes were filled with the unbroken . . . transparent . . . saturated blue above me, and I felt a mystic elation. . . . The paradox of spatial infinity suddenly pierced my brain. . . . You could shoot a super-arrow into the blue with super-force which could carry it beyond the pull of the earth’s gravity, past the moon, past the sun’s attraction . . . and the worst of it was that all this was not fantasy but literally true. Such an arrow could be made real.”¹ The importance of this experience is reflected in the title he chose for his book and his explanation of its meaning. A little later in the volume Koestler writes, “the thirst for the absolute is a stigma which marks those unable to find satisfaction in the relative world of the now and here. My obsession with the arrow was merely the first phase of the quest. When it proved sterile, the Infinite as a target was replaced by Utopias of one kind or another. It was the same quest and the same all-or-nothing men-

¹ Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue* (London: Collins/Hamish Hamilton, 1952), 51–52.

tality which drove me to the Promised Land and into the Communist Party.²

Koestler's invocation of "the Promised Land" refers to his first major utopian venture, his emigration to Palestine in 1926. Though Koestler refers in general to the influence of the environment on the young, he omits from his generally truthful autobiography any mention of the antisemitism he experienced at school in Budapest and even more so as a student at the Vienna Technological University in the early 1920s. After a humiliating defeat in World War I and the fall of the Hapsburg Empire, the tiny mother country of Austria was inundated by hundreds of thousands of refugees from the newly independent countries of East and Central Europe, and a hungry, poverty-stricken Vienna was filled to overflowing with destitute Eastern European Jews. The backlash from the German-speaking population was formidable, and nowhere were battles fought more violently than between rioting German students and Jewish students at the two big Viennese universities.

Koestler became a prominent activist and leading figure in one of the Jewish fraternities and began to read up on Jewish politics and international affairs. After reading one day about the appalling Arab persecution of Jewish settlers in Palestine, he became a proto-Zionist. But it was only after the arrival in Vienna of the Russian Revisionist Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and after Koestler listened to Jabotinsky's impassioned speeches, that he was converted into a full-blooded Zionist of a special sort. Like Jabotinsky and most of his followers, and like the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, Koestler's vision of the ideal Jew was that of a cultivated, secular, European professional, and of a Jewish homeland as a place rather like Western Europe, where people like himself could feel thoroughly at home without suffering the stigma of otherness.

With his quick wits and good connections, the young Koestler netted a rare entry visa for Palestine, but once there, was taken aback by the primitiveness of the countryside, the roughness of most of the settlers, and especially by the strength of their dedication to the Hebrew language and Judaism. Jabotinsky's brand of Zionism required a total transformation of existing Jewry and seemed to promise an entirely

² *Ibid.*, 52.

new kind of life, but the life he found in Palestine did not suit him at all. The majority of the Jewish population worked on collective farms and the small, urban groups of educated Jews were a tiny minority. After three mostly uncomfortable years, Koestler concluded that Palestinian Jews could never be like Europeans and he could never be a Palestinian.

His next utopia loomed into view while he was working as a journalist in Berlin from 1930 to 1932, at a time when Hitler and the Nazi Party were beginning their rise to power and when the only serious counterweight to a nascent fascism in Europe, with its attendant antisemitism, seemed to be the communist party, which incidentally had many Jews in its leadership. Koestler had seen poverty up close in postwar Vienna and saw much more of it in a Germany still reeling from reparations incurred after World War I. He had a natural sympathy for the Socialist left, whose leaders he regarded as the “legitimate heirs and trustees of the Judeo-Christian tradition.”³ In the early thirties the socialist parties were in disarray and Koestler soon found his way to Marxism, which had the same electric impact on him as Zionism beforehand.

By the time I had finished with Engels’s *Feuerbach* and Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, something had clicked in my brain and I was shaken by a mental explosion. To say that one had ‘seen the light’ is a poor description of the rapture which only the convert knows. . . . The new light seems to pour from all directions across the skull; the whole universe falls into a pattern like the stray pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. . . . There is now an answer to every question—doubts and conflicts are a matter of the tortured past. . . .⁴

It is interesting to compare this imagery with Koestler’s vision of the arrow in the blue and later his conversion to Zionism, and to compare the two negative forces that drove him toward his utopias as well.

³ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (London: Collins/Hamish Hamilton, 1954), 227.

⁴ Koestler, *Arrow*, 231.

In the case of Zionism, he reports that when he read the pamphlets describing Arab atrocities against the Jews, "I felt myself choke and seethe with impotent anger.... Like most people who suffer from Chronic Indignation [the capitalization is Koestler's]. I can feel during an attack the infusion of adrenalin into the bloodstream, the craving of the muscles . . . for violent action."⁵ In the case of communism, Koestler was propelled by a hatred of capitalism:

The event that roused my indignation to a pitch never reached before was the American policy of destroying food stocks to keep prices up during the depression years.... Its effect on Europeans was that of a crude and indeed terrifying shock, which destroyed what little faith they still had in the existing social order.... Indignation glowed in me like a furnace. At times, I thought that I was choking from its fumes; at other times, I felt like hitting out, and shooting from a barricade or throwing sticks of dynamite.⁶

The physiological symptoms were almost identical in both cases, accompanied by a conversion that was religious in its intensity. His actual conversion to communism occurred in the summer of 1931, when Koestler secretly joined the German Communist Party, and within a year, in the summer of 1932, he achieved his goal of traveling to the "New Zion," that is, the Soviet Union, a much more important entity than the Palestinian one, which "promised a magic cure—not only for a small ethnic group, but for the whole of mankind."⁷ He remained there for eighteen months and saw a great deal of the country, from Ukraine (where he was based) to the Caucasus to Central Asia, writing an account, *Red Days and White Nights*, that purported to be a travel guide, but was a work of propaganda in disguise. Though journalistic in tone, it was Koestler's first book, and marks a turning point in his development that was to have decidedly ambiguous consequences.

⁵ Ibid., 97.

⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁷ Ibid., 246.

Writings

Ambiguities were present in Koestler's writings from the very beginning. His first book, with a binarism in its title that became a hallmark of his later career, was indeed a work of propaganda, extolling the Soviets' industry and accomplishments and denouncing the misdeeds of the imperialists and tsars who had preceded them. It was turned down by the state publishers in Moscow, however, as "frivolous and light-hearted," and eventually published in a small edition in German by the National Minorities Publishing House in Kharkov in 1934, shortly after Koestler had departed.

Koestler later claimed that the book had been heavily censored, which is probably true, but he had also censored it himself. Much of his time in the Ukraine coincided with the notorious famine of those years, brought about by Stalin's collectivization of agriculture, yet Koestler managed to ignore it by employing the cliché formula that shortcomings in Soviet society were "unfortunate relics of the past" and would be rectified in the "glorious future" that lay ahead. The "frivolity" Moscow publishers found in his book alluded to attempts to enliven his material with humor and western-style human interest (traces of which remained in the published version) and to his unfamiliarity with Soviet orthodoxy. Unbowed, Koestler decided to stay in Moscow and drafted a movie script set in Berlin, purporting to show how the German newspapers censored themselves, but when he found no support for his script, he was forced to leave. It's worth noting that before leaving, he managed to meet three important Soviet leaders: Nikolai Bukharin, Karl Radek, and Mikhail Koltsov.

The most interesting work Koestler composed in Moscow was his first and only play, *An Improbable Occurrence*, a whimsical tale about a meteor plunging into Lake Wannsee near Berlin, and the sudden appearance in a nearby hotel bar of two characters whom the residents take to be aliens from outer space. These aliens let it be known that they are searching for a happy planet to colonize, since their own is beginning to cool down and will soon be uninhabitable. Panic ensues, the German government resigns, and the reins of power are taken over by a poet-dictator called Isebein, who abolishes money and private property, introduces a four-day work week, and presides

over a workers' paradise—until the aliens are unmasked as impostors, the workers turn on Isebein, fall out with one another, and capitalism is restored.

Isebein is clearly Koestler's alter ego, a dreamer who believes in the transformative power of the aliens' story, if not in the aliens themselves—it is hinted that he perhaps knows all along they are fraudulent. But in an impassioned speech near the end of the play he insists that "the newspapers are lying" and continues: "Believe in the deed, if not the doer. Do you want your old rulers back? Who am I fighting for? For you! For your battered longings. For your deceived dreams. . . . I am fighting for the cosmic rights of joy. . . . Come to me, all ye whom life has rejected and betrayed."⁸

The play remained unpublished in its original form, but Koestler rewrote it after World War II under a new title, *Twilight Bar*, and it was staged in Paris in 1946 by Jean Vilar, with André Gide in the auditorium. Being mistaken for a mature work by the author of *Darkness at Noon*, it aroused unrealistic expectations and was a critical failure, but as an apprentice work, it is fascinating for its central message, which is that while utopia is a highly desirable goal, it will fail if it lacks some sort of coercion, and it offers an interesting reflection of Koestler's complex feelings about the Soviet Union at the time he left it.

A few weeks later, visiting his native Hungary, Koestler started another play, *Mbo-Mba on the Road*, about another revolutionary attempt to establish a utopia, set this time in the imaginary African colony of Zambezi. The plot centers on a native postmaster, Mbo-Mba, who launches a successful rebellion against the British colonial authorities and is installed as the colony's dictatorial new ruler. Koestler's approach to his subject matter was again satirical, but the satire this time was directed not at the imperfections of the populace, but at the dictator, Mbo-Mba, who also needs coercion for his program to succeed. He calls his doctrine "Mboism" and insists that his followers call him "the Leader." Since the play was written in German, "Leader" came out as "Führer," so the parallel with Hitler was obvious. But Mbo's revolutionary rhetoric has a Marxist as well as a fascist

⁸ Arthur Koestler, "An Improbable Occurrence," typescript, Koestler Archive, Edinburgh University, MS2336/3.

ring to it: “We have taken power! The revolution is triumphant! The people are free and the nation is reborn! Tyranny is ended!” The real subject of the play is not the ideology of happiness but the use—and abuse—of power.

When his followers ask why they still have to do back-breaking labor under the new order, Mbo tells them they are no longer hauling “the ship of tyranny,” but “the ship of revolution” and “the ship of progress,” and should be happy. They complain that they expected to ride inside the ship with Mbo, but Mbo explains that they will have to wait. Their reward will come once they have pulled the ship through the “rapids” that lie ahead, when the “great work of liberation” will be complete. Hauling the ship is a torment, he assures them, only when tyranny is at the helm. With Mbo-Mba in charge, hard labor is glorious and honorable.⁹ There’s a foretaste of Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in this play, written fifteen years earlier than Orwell’s novel, but Koestler, unlike Orwell, was not ready for such conclusions yet. He continued to worry away at the theme of utopias in two novels written in Paris while he was working for Willi Münzenberg’s antifascist organization, one unpublished and one published.

The unpublished work was a novel for young adults called *The Adventures of Comrade Dickybird and His Friends in the Emigration*. It was based on Koestler’s experiences teaching at a communist-run orphanage outside Paris. The orphanage is meant to be a microcosm of the communist dream, a “mini-utopia” perhaps, but the theme of indoctrination through education as a path to happiness is subverted by the remarks of a clever and insecure young cynic called Ullrich, another stand-in for Koestler, who finds it impossible to merge himself with the collective. As a result, Ullrich is ostracized and begins to suspect that communist collectivism is a lie. His fears are put to rest by an older teacher at the school, who explains that Ullrich needs to overcome his inheritance as a bourgeois individualist and look to the future. “The future of history belongs to others, not to us,” says the teacher. “But what about justice?” asks Ullrich. “Justice is nothing other than the projection of the next stage of history into the past,”

⁹ Arthur Koestler, *Mbo-Mba útnak indul*, typescript, Koestler Archive, MS2343/4. The title is in Hungarian, but the play itself is written in German.

responds the teacher. "The moral truths of the prophets come not from heaven, but from anticipation of the future."¹⁰

It is symptomatic of Koestler's naivety and confusion that he arranged to read excerpts from the novel to the communist-dominated Association of German Writers in Exile at the well-named Café Mephisto in Paris. Unsurprisingly, his hardened listeners were not taken in: Koestler's Ullrich was altogether smarter and more convincing than his Marxist mentor. Koestler was informed that the communist caucus considered the book guilty of "ideological errors." He was so upset by this rejection (which he had implicitly anticipated in the novel itself) that he made a halfhearted, luckily unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide.

Koestler had recently started work on his first novel for adults, *The Gladiators*, in which he portrayed the Roman slave leader Spartacus as a revolutionary and kind of primitive socialist. Spartacus founds a utopian colony that Koestler calls "Sun City" (after Campanella's utopia with a similar name) and embraces the values of liberty, equality and fraternity that Koestler deemed essential to any working version of utopia. But Spartacus is brought down by the same qualities of human greed and cruelty that defeated Isebein in *An Improbable Occurrence* and that Mbo-Mba overcame by crucifying the ringleaders of a rebellion against him. Spartacus refuses to crack down on the rebels within his own movement and thus, in Koestler's terminology, refuses to obey "the law of detours," that is, he should have detoured from the main road of his ideals and executed the enemies of his revolution, thus subordinating ends to means in order to gain the greater goal of justice for all in the new order.¹¹

It's not clear to what extent Koestler is simply pointing out Spartacus's failure, and to what extent he blames him for failing to put ends before means. George Orwell later pointed to Koestler's ambivalence by noting that whereas the ends-means dilemma is presented clearly enough, Spartacus's motives remain obscure. The republic of the slaves seemed to have collapsed because the slaves were discontented and didn't want to work (as a result of their "hedonism"), rather than

¹⁰ Arthur Koestler, *Die Erlebnisse des Genossen Piepvoegel in der Emigration*, "typescript, Koestler Archive, MS2327/1.

¹¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Gladiators* (London: Hutchinson, 1965).

because of any struggle for power. According to Orwell, “if Spartacus is the prototype of the modern revolutionary—and obviously he is intended as that—he should have gone astray because of the impossibility of combining power with righteousness. As it is, he is an almost passive figure, acted upon rather than acting and at times not convincing. The story partly fails because the central problem of revolution has been avoided, or, at least, has not been solved.”¹²

Orwell had the luxury of hindsight writing this after World War II, but he was on the mark about Koestler’s ambivalence at the time: Koestler had definitely not solved the “central problem of the revolution.” Still, *The Gladiators*, which Koestler completed only after being jailed and expecting a death sentence during the Spanish Civil War, seems in retrospect to have been a necessary preparation for his most famous work, *Darkness at Noon*, in which a revolutionary leader, Rubashov, does put ends before means in the name of establishing a terrestrial utopia and in doing so dooms himself to death.

Darkness at Noon is too complex a novel to analyze in depth here, but let me begin by noting that although it was inspired by the Soviet show trials of the 1930s, and although Rubashov is ostensibly a composite of Bukharin, Radek, and Trotsky, he also represents the Koestler of 1938, a party zealot who has suddenly woken to the fact that his iron faith is based on a lie, and that the ideals to which he has clung for so long have been betrayed. Koestler thus passes judgment on himself when his hero realizes that the utopia he has sought all his life can never be created by the revolutionary movement to which he has given his allegiance. Rubashov, a party leader, is trapped by his words, his faith, and especially his ruthless actions as a leader. He has been responsible for the deaths of former comrades, and his present remorse only makes his situation worse. Ivanov, one of his two interrogators, mockingly reminds him of the party’s credo: “The individual was nothing, the Party was all; the branch which broke from the tree must wither.”¹³ And he persuades Rubashov that he owes the party this one last service of confession and his death for the good of the cause.

¹² George Orwell, “Arthur Koestler,” in *Arthur Koestler, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Murray A. Sperber (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1977), 17.

¹³ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 66.

It is a more sophisticated version of the teacher's arguments in *Comrade Dickybird* and a pessimistic coda to *The Gladiators*. Even if Spartacus *had* followed the law of detours, Koestler now suggests, he would have fallen victim to the law. Koestler could only have written about this subject with such power and conviction because of his own striving to believe in, and perhaps bring about, a workable form of utopia, but his experience of watching and reporting on the civil war in Spain and months in a Spanish jail had brought about a revolution in his thinking, much as Orwell had done after seeing at firsthand how closely fascist and communist ruthlessness and discipline resembled one another. Koestler had officially (but secretly) resigned from the communist party and in writing *Darkness at Noon*, endeavored to settle accounts with his early utopian dreams.

Conclusion

The main questions raised by this pilgrim's progress are what drove Koestler's utopian impulses in the first place and to what extent were his motives shared by other revolutionary intellectuals of the same period, such as the Italian writer Ignazio Silone. Koestler tried to answer these questions in his autobiographies, pointing to two main factors. The first was psychological: the troubled psyche of an emotionally damaged individual; the second was social and environmental: distress over the sufferings inflicted on fellow humans by violence, coercion, and inequality. Taken together, they spawned a thirst for justice that in Koestler's case, produced the sort of physical symptoms that I noted earlier. His yearning for justice became particularly acute after the havoc wrought by World War I and the Great Depression, a period that seemed to embody the "end of history" in a different sense from more modern times, and his despair was shared by most left-wing intellectuals of the period.

But beyond the two aspects that Koestler mentions, I perceive another component of utopianism that can only be called "metaphysical," to which Koestler glancingly refers in his autobiography without really developing it in any detail. His comment appears in *Arrow in the Blue* just after the passage I have already quoted describing the questing spirit that led him first to "the Promised Land" and then into the

communist party. "In other ages," he writes there, "aspirations of this kind found their natural fulfillment in God."¹⁴

"God" is a word that shows up even more rarely than "utopia" in Koestler's early work, and it is hardly to be found in *Darkness at Noon*, yet in writing his novel, Koestler was heavily influenced by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where God is a major presence. One of Koestler's two epigraphs is taken from Dostoyevsky's novel: "Man, man, one cannot live quite without pity." Furthermore, in *Darkness at Noon*, the interrogator, Ivanov, actually discusses the novel with Rubashov, insisting that Raskolnikov is guilty because he commits his crime out of personal gratification, whereas the Party's "crimes" are justified by the moral and collective goal they serve. Koestler—and the reader—know better. Raskolnikov also justifies his crime as "objectively" moral, and in Dostoyevsky's eyes he is a representative and forerunner of all revolutionaries and terrorists who are willing to sacrifice human life for political ends.

In *Darkness at Noon*, Rubashov thinks and speaks a rational, dialectical, Marxist-inflected language, but the themes that predominate in his mind are crime, guilt, remorse, even redemption, which are only remotely connected to Marxist ideology. Indeed, Rubashov is closer to Raskolnikov than most critics have realized. In the next novel he wrote, *Arrival and Departure*, Koestler's hero, Peter Slavek, is driven to risk his life for the antifascist cause by an ethical imperative "too deep to be explained or ignored," and Slavek concludes that "reasons do not matter. . . . They are the shell around the core, and the core remains untouchable, beyond the reach of cause and effect."¹⁵ Koestler's search for a workable faith was not easy, however. In *The Age of Longing* (the title speaks for itself), the subject is the Cold War projected into the future. The Russian characters with their "iron faith" come across as strong and attractive, but wrong-headed, whereas their western opponents have the right values, but are weak. As one critic presciently noted, Koestler had not entirely lost his infatuation with the object of his earlier desires. Like Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, he was rationally eager to reject absolutism, but instinctively unable to accept the

¹⁴ Koestler, *Arrow*, 52.

¹⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), 168.

democratic alternative, while his longing for a new age of faith, in the words of another critic, was undermined by his contempt for human weakness.

Koestler's longing for a new faith to replace communism led him at one time or another to dally with both Catholicism and Judaism, before he turned to a surprising alternative, modern science. Science, one might think is the antithesis of faith, but whether consciously or unconsciously, Koestler began to explore science with the same metaphysical goal of finding answers to existential questions. Koestler was far too sophisticated to embrace the mechanical idea of scientific progress as a new faith in and of itself, but he did feel that science might hold a key to that crucial utopian will o' the wisp, the secret of human happiness. Unfortunately, metaphysical questions and utopian hopes shaped (and in the view of many critics, spoiled) almost every scientific book he wrote.

Since one would need to write another article in order to examine this subject in any depth, let me simply summarize it to round out my argument. In two early books that Koestler wrote on aspects of human creativity, *Insight and Outlook* and especially *The Sleepwalkers*, he speculated that creativity might itself develop sufficiently to solve "the riddle of the universe." In *The Sleepwalkers*, he writes a great deal about how and why "the age of religious conflict" and religious belief had crumbled so easily in the face of discoveries by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galilei. He complains that the "new determinants of man's fate" (mechanical laws, atoms, glands, genes) provide "no moral guidance, no values and meaning, and nothing to guide his conscience." It turns out that Koestler's reference point is the "golden age" of Pythagoras—a utopia if ever there was one—when faith and reason were one, and the "unitary sources of inspiration" for prophet, poet, and philosopher were still taken for granted. Koestler's villain is Galilei, the very symbol of a freethinking, secularized scientist and the hero of progressives throughout the ages. Koestler's own hero, Kepler ("K = K" he jotted in one of his notebooks) is hailed for his belief that God was a mathematician.¹⁶

In *The Act of Creation*, another book about creativity, Koestler examined what he called the "Cartesian Catastrophe." Descartes had

¹⁶ Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 539.

split the world into “realms of matter and mind” and was responsible for the identification of the mind with conscious thinking. The result in modern times was the dominance of a “shallow rationalism,” the “impoverishment of psychology,” and the separation of the “two cultures” of science and art. Art was endowed with a religious dimension. The self was experienced as being “a part of a larger whole, a higher unity,” which could be “Nature, God, Mankind, Universal Order or the Anima Mundi.”¹⁷

Another scientific book by Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, was ostensibly about neurology and the workings of the human brain, but Koestler exploited his subject to launch a furious attack on behaviorism and neo-Darwinism, denouncing both as determinist theories that denied man his autonomy and free will: they either bore traces of or resembled the thought processes of Marxism. He preferred Lamarck’s theories to Darwin’s, because they held out the prospect of some sort of guided self-improvement, instead of leaving man to blind fate. Koestler also explored what he called the “pathology of the human mind” and the human urge to self-destruction. He came up with another astonishing idea, namely that someone should invent a pill to rectify man’s urge for self-destruction and enable some kind of peace on earth (the kind of action we might be inclined to identify nowadays with Prozac).¹⁸

“Peace on earth” recalls Koestler’s original fascination with utopian ideas in *An Improbable Occurrence*, and to which he returned in a late work, *The Roots of Coincidence*, in which he examined synchronicity, seriality, and parapsychology as possible keys to understanding how the universe worked. “The limitations of our biological equipment,” he wrote in that book, “may condemn us to the role of Peeping Toms at the keyhole of eternity. But at least let us take the stuffing out of the keyhole, which blocks even our limited view.”¹⁹

I have strayed a long way from the early twentieth century and communism by now, but I hope readers will accept the connection I am making. Koestler was essentially a mystic at heart. This was the

¹⁷ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 21–22, 148.

¹⁸ Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

¹⁹ Arthur Koestler, *The Roots of Coincidence* (New York: Random House, 1972), 140.

meaning of his reverie about the arrow in the blue and the experience that changed his life in a Spanish jail during the Civil War. Condemned at first to solitary confinement, he began thinking about his favorite philosopher, Schopenhauer, and about Schopenhauer's idea that death was nothing more than a shedding of the self and a merging with the All-One, the end of self-assertion and the beginning of self-transcendence. He experienced what Romain Rolland (followed by Freud) had identified as an "oceanic feeling" of oneness with humanity, brought on by his experiences in jail. The memory stayed with him his whole life and fed the hope of a higher unity. "I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. There was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist."²⁰

²⁰ Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, 352, 370.

MARIUS STAN

*Radical Engagements:
Surrealism, Art, and Politics
in Interwar Romania*

The chapter highlights, explores, and explains the links between international and Romanian surrealism in the 1930s, while also looking at the legacy of this connection in the postwar years.¹ I regard surrealism as part of the larger avant-garde phenomenon in which artists of Romanian origin, many of them of Jewish descent, played a prominent role. From Tristan Tzara (born Samuel Rosenstock, 1896–1963) and Marcel Iancu (also known as Janco, 1895–1984) to Victor Brauner (1903–1966) and Gherasim Luca (1913–1994), the Romanian avant-garde was an extraordinary intellectual adventure. I insist on the lesser-known case of the formidably interesting surrealist poet Gellu Naum and his ties to the underground Romanian Communist Party.² I refer in my analysis to archival materials, previously inaccessible primary sources, including files from interwar Romania's Siguranța (secret police) that focused on Naum. From the very outset, I wish to emphasize that unlike some of his avant-garde colleagues who made spectacular careers in Stalinist Romania, Naum remained politically unregimented. Several of his friends had impressive professional and political

¹ This paper is the final result of a research made possible by a one-year post-doctoral fellowship (2017–2018) at The Research Institute of the University of Bucharest (ICUB), Social Sciences Division.

² See Gellu Naum, *Opere*, Vol 1, *Poezii* (Iași: Polirom, 2011); Gherasim Luca, *Self-Shadowing Prey*, translated by Mary Ann Caws (London: Contra Mundum, 2013); Gherasim Luca, *The Inventor of Love and Other Writings*, translated by Julian and Laura Semilian, foreword by Andrei Codrescu (Boston: Commonwealth Books/Black Widow Press, 2009).

careers after 1945. One such case was the playwright Aurel Baranga (1913–1979), who became a Central Committee member during Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule and the regime's official comedigrapher. Another one was poet Virgil Teodorescu (1909–1987), a former member of the surrealist circle, who was a CC member between 1974 and 1979 and served as president of the Writers' Union between 1974 and 1977.³ Naum maintained, until his death, a deep commitment to decency, dignity, and honor. In this respect, it may not be an exaggeration to compare him to the great Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998).

The Dadaist venture started in the heart of Europe, in the ostensibly lethargic city of Zürich. Switzerland had become, with the passing of time, a cliché of neutrality, although the historical journeys of many socially and politically engaged personalities began in this country. This is the case of the artists gathered around the Cabaret Voltaire, a vibrantly uninhibited cultural space founded in 1916 by Dadaist Hugo Ball⁴ (1886–1927) and, among others, by the Romanian Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu (Janco). During World War I, Switzerland's neutrality allowed many refugees to set up ideological, cultural, artistic, and sometimes even political projects here.⁵ And as any place has a certain spirit, Cabaret Voltaire had, from its inception, a fine inter-

³ See The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, Florica Dobre, ed., *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R., 1945–1989. Dicționar* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 83, 572–73.

⁴ In his diary, "Flight out of Time," Hugo Ball describes the opening night: "The place was full to bursting; many could not get in. About six in the evening, when we were still busy hammering and putting up Futurist posters, there appeared an oriental-looking deputation of four little men with portfolios and pictures under their arms, bowing politely many times. They introduced themselves: Marcel Janco the painter, Tristan Tzara, George Janco, and a fourth, whose name I did not catch. Arp was also there, and we came to an understanding without many words. Soon, Janco's opulent Archangels hung alongside the other objects of beauty and, that same evening, Tzara gave a reading of poems, conservative in style, which he rather endearingly fished out of the various pockets of his coat". Source: Adrian Notz, "Introduction," in *Dada East? The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, exhibition catalog (Fargfabriken/ Stockholm/ Sweden, Bucharest: RH Printing House, 2007), 5.

⁵ See Andrei Codrescu, *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Helen Rappaport, *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

nationalist touch. In the words of the late American historian Peter Gay, “neutral Switzerland, nearly surrounded by the interminable mass butchery on the western front” seemed “a curious setting for an antiwar, antiart manifestation. But precisely the comfortable detachment of Zürich made the Cabaret Voltaire safe for dissidents from abroad—pacifists, conscientious objectors, avant-garde artists and writers scornful of their fellows’ patriotic effusions.”⁶ It was, indeed, a veritable Tower of Babel of aesthetical and political cosmopolitanism. In this space of European intellectual effervescence, one could hear, in all languages, the expressions of the cultural trends of the day (Tristan Tzara, for instance, used to recite his poems in Romanian).⁷ It is noteworthy that from the very beginning about half of the Dadaists at the Cabaret Voltaire were Romanians.⁸ How did that happen?

Lest we forget, the flattering nickname of “Little Paris” that the Romanian capital had at the time was closely related to Bucharest’s cultural and intellectual enthusiasm. There was a tradition of the petite bourgeoisie to study in the major academic centers of Europe (particularly in Paris, Vienna or Berlin). Upon their return, the youth attempted to implement visions and ideas to which they had been exposed abroad. However, in spite of this cosmopolitan pattern,⁹ many commentators agree that the Romanian avant-garde artists stood out in the great internationalist family due to an enduringly salient Eastern

⁶ See Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy. From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 341.

⁷ See the entry on Tristan Tzara, in Jacques Julliard and Michel Winnock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français : Les personnes, les lieux, les moments* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 1123–24.

⁸ Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East. The Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, Mass and London: The MIT Press, 2006).

⁹ “Poets, artists, doctors, lawyers, politicians, they all studied in Paris, Vienna, Berlin or Munich. In Romania, Cubism is more Cubistic and Futurism is more Futuristic than anywhere else. Small French-like policemen harass the peasants on their way to the farmers’ market, the cabarets and variety theaters are only cheap copies of those in Montmartre; one can see revues based on French originals, sad and boring, copies of some equivocal comedies imported directly from Théâtre Antoine or the Comédie Française. In brief: a fantastic city in an incredible country. Thirty years later, everything will be different...” Tom Sandqvist, “Cuvînt înaintea,” in *Arhiva Durerii* (Stockholm/Sweden/Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2000), 5.

European component. Hugo Ball himself considered the Romanians at Cabaret Voltaire as resiliently Oriental, a sign that surrealism too remained muddled in geocultural segregation. As already mentioned, the Romanians in Zürich had Jewish backgrounds and, in the political context of that period, their exodus to the West had a deeply pragmatic meaning. On the one hand, it was linked to the rampant antisemitism in their home country. On the other, it was an expression of dissatisfaction with what they perceived as cultural parochialism. In its connection with politics, the avant-garde movement was more often than not a response to politics, a peculiar, *sui generis* effect of an intense causality. Indeed, “the First World War ushered in a disastrous period for the Jews of Europe. The intensification of nationalism inevitably drew attention to the anomalous status of Jews, along with that of other ethnic-faith minorities.”¹⁰

With regard to the period discussed here, we can say now (albeit remaining in the realm of speculation) that the avant-garde in arts can be ideally reproduced only in a political climate that permits the freedom of choice and, consequently, of controversy. Nevertheless, a totalitarian (or, for that matter, an authoritarian) regime cannot allow sufficient space for the unencumbered expression of artistic experiments. The avant-garde, generically speaking, often seems to accept a political fashion instead of creating or promoting a new one. The hypothesis according to which aesthetic radicalism (in arts) and social radicalism (in politics) are related stands in incontrovertible contrast to historical evidence.¹¹ Obviously, during the first years of Bolshevik power, the Soviet regime tolerated artistic experimentation, yet, with the exception of Lev Trotsky and Anatoly Lunacharsky, the party ideologues were hostile to the bolder attempts to transgress realist traditions. Vladimir Mayakovsky, for instance, was often criticized for his bold aesthetic experiments.¹² Following the Soviet Writers’ Congress

¹⁰ See David Cesarani, *The Left and the Jews: The Jews and the Left* (London: Labour Friends of Israel, 2004), 52.

¹¹ Renato Poggioli, “The Avant-Garde and Politics,” *Yale French Studies* No. 39 (1967): 181.

¹² See Michael Scammell, “The Bad Boy of Russian Poetry,” *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 2015 (online edition: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/sep/24/mayakovsky-bad-boy-russian-poetry/> last accessed September 25, 2017).

in 1934, socialist realism became the mandatory creative method, a Procrustean palimpsest meant to operate as the only tolerated artistic style.¹³ In the same vein, the early political phase of surrealism was, actually, quite short.

The International Dimension

A brief excursion into the history of French surrealism, so akin to the Romanian one, is needed, mainly because this connection had been of significant concern for the Siguranța. It is quite thrilling to retrieve, after almost eight decades, the Romanian police files on French, Russian, and other avant-garde intellectuals and communist politicians (Ilya Ehrenburg, Maurice Thorez, Aleksandra Kollontai, or Romain Rolland). Louis Aragon (1897–1982) abandoned surrealism for communism, while others solved this dilemma by jettisoning communism (at that moment synonymous with Stalinism) and remaining faithful to surrealist art.¹⁴ The factious struggles in the aftermath of Lenin's death and the fierce rivalry between Stalin and Trotsky led to sectarian fights among members of the surrealist movement, from Paris to Prague. In France, Aragon and Paul Éluard, to name just the most prominent figures, espoused Stalin's side, while André Breton remained loyal to the original revolutionary creed. Aragon and his Russian-born wife, Elsa Triolet, whom he married in 1928, visited the USSR in 1930 and fell in love with the Great Experiment. As Frederick Brown noticed: "Breton's break with Communism followed his break with Louis Aragon. Largely responsible for their estrangement, after thirteen years of literary partnership, had been Elsa Triolet, a Russian novelist better known for close ties to Ilya Ehrenburg and to the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky than for her own writing."¹⁵ Upon his return to France, Aragon published *Le Front rouge*, a book he had written in Moscow which pro-

¹³ Frank Westerman, *Engineers of the Soul: In the Footsteps of Stalin's Writers* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

¹⁴ Poggioli, "The Avant-Garde and Politics," 182.

¹⁵ See Frederick Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France 1914–1940* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 217.

voked critical reactions, including his indictment for “provocation.”¹⁶ Their political disagreements notwithstanding, André Breton defended Aragon in his book *Misère de la poésie*, invoking freedom of expression. However, Aragon made his life-long choice in favor of the USSR and its French instrument, the PCF (*Partie Communiste Française*) and broke with the surrealist movement.¹⁷ He supported enthusiastically the *Front Populaire*, participated in the anti-Nazi resistance, continued to loyally endorse Soviet politics until 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev delivered his Secret Speech. In spite of his new *prise de conscience*, Aragon supported the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. In 1968, Aragon and the journal he edited, *Les Lettres Françaises*, embraced the ideas of the Prague Spring. The author of *Les yeux d’Elsa* called Gustáv Husák’s “normalized” Czechoslovakia a “Biafra of the spirit.” In his last years, Aragon published essays and poems which revealed a deep sense of sadness. His 1972 article, *La valse des adieux*, spoke bitterly about “une vie gâchée de fond en comble” (“a life wasted completely”). Yet, on the occasion of his 75th birthday, Aragon accepted a high Soviet decoration.

As for Paul Éluard (1895–1952), another major surrealist writer turned Stalinist, he became, during the first stage of the Cold War, an iconic figure of the Stalinist global cultural front. In 1950, when Breton asked him to intervene on behalf of their common Czech friend Závěš Kalandra sentenced to death in Prague, he infamously responded: “J’ai trop à faire avec les innocents qui clament leur innocence pour m’occuper des coupables qui clament leur culpabilité” (“I am too busy with innocent people who proclaim their innocence in order to deal with guilty ones who claim their culpability”).¹⁸

¹⁶ See Nicole Racin, “Louis Aragon,” in Julliard and Winnock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels*, 73–76.

¹⁷ For the political culture of French communism, see Marc Lazar, *Le communisme. Une passion française* (Paris: Perrin, 2002).

¹⁸ See the entry on Éluard by François Buot, in Julliard and Winnock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels*, 438–39; http://www.leshommesanssepaules.com/auteur-Paul_ELUARD-312-1-1-0-1.html; Marius Stan, “‘Viața e în altă parte.’ Cazul Závěš Kalandra,” *Contributors*, March 24, 2014 (<http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/via%C8%9Ba-e-in-alta-parte-cazul-zavis-kalandra/>).

It seems therefore obvious that the positioning of avant-garde artists toward politics (although initially it was a matter of fending off politics) was the source of an infinite series of tensions, surrenders, and returns. In order to remain the center of attention and in the eye of the ideological storms of those times, a transition needed to be made from the subjectivity of individual freedom (expressed artistically) to the more radical subjectivity of contesting the status quo in a revolutionary way, in fact a rebuff of social reality as a whole (expressed politically).¹⁹ What remained? Euphemistically speaking, equating the aesthetic revolution and the social one was a mere rhetorical act. Gone were the times when these two approaches overlapped. The iron fist of Stalinism and the Nazi war on “degenerate” art led to isolation, hopelessness, ignoble compromises, and, to a great extent, oblivion. It was rather an unavowed, maybe subconscious, return to an anarchist sensibility rather than a resurrection of what was the project of *la révolution surréaliste* which, for all practical purposes, tried to bring together Karl Marx with his “Change the world!” and Arthur Rimbaud with “Changer la vie!”²⁰ After all, the avant-garde’s style was plagued by an exacerbated individualism, most frequently biographical and psychological—see the poem of Vladimir Mayakovsky, “To a Cut-Throat,” in which he combines the belief that he would survive his own death with a cult for the anonymous multitude (the masses of the future).²¹ Beyond shared positions in successive manifestos, each biography in the trans-national surrealist saga bears its own irreducible, ineffable, and inexhaustible hallmark.

I try to capture here the above-described features by focusing on the fascinating case of Gellu Naum, a friend of painter Victor Brauner, admirer of Aragon and Éluard, and a brilliant poet himself. Other members of the same Romanian surrealist group were the poets Gherasim Luca (1913–1994) and Dolfi Trost (1916–1966). In 1941, Trost and Luca were among the founders of the Bucharest surrealist circle which included Naum. In 1945, Trost and Luca published *La dialectic-*

¹⁹ Stelian Tănase, *Avangarda românească în arhivele Siguranței* (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 13–14.

²⁰ See Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 145; <http://www.pileface.com/sollers/spip.php?article269>

²¹ Poggioli, “The Avant-Garde and Politics,” 184.

*tique de la dialectique: A message to the international movement in Paris*²². It was in fact a manifesto for the preservation of a revolutionary mentality against the stultification of the once dynamic movement. Born in Romania in 1914, Luca committed suicide in 1994, in Paris, by throwing himself, like the fellow Romanian-born exile, Paul Celan, into the Seine. Dolfi Trost was born in Brăila, a cosmopolitan port on the Danube and like Luca, was Jewish. Trost left Europe for the United States and died in 1966 in Chicago.

La dialectique forewarned its readers of the dangers of transforming surrealism in a “movement of artistic revolt,” spoke about “the transformation of desire in the reality of desire,” about the “non-Oedipal existence” (as liberation from what Freud once saw as ancestral memories and complexes), or about “embracing dialectical materialism” and the faith in the “historical destiny of the proletariat.” This mix of Marxism and Freudianism was, to a certain extent, reminiscent of Salvador Dalí’s “paranoiac-critical” worldview. Much like Breton, the Romanian surrealists extolled a “lyrical behavior,” a new mythology of the ordinary. But even so, opinions were not always congruent within the same group: when Trost and Luca suggested that “diurnal reactionary leftovers” had to be eliminated from the literary/artistic fusion of the so-called diurnal existence and nocturnal existence, Gellu Naum rejected the proposition as “oneiric politics.”

Political Police and Gellu Naum

How does this chemistry between the artist and political engagement function? One can argue that political enthusiasm, turned into fanaticism, stifles the creative potential. During the 1930s and generally speaking throughout the twentieth century, very few artists could escape such self-induced, fatally sterilizing, entrancement. They became proud soldiers of the fantasized world revolution. Party behests were more important than aesthetic imperatives. Paradoxically, while cherishing boundless freedom for the mind, the surrealists accepted

²² For the cultural connections between Romania and France, see Anne Quinney, ed., *Paris–Bucharest, Bucharest–Paris: Francophone Writers from Romania* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2012).

the emasculation of this freedom by abiding to the Leninist commandment of *partiinost* (party-mindedness).²³ When the avant-gardists left the cocoon of art to become politically engaged, they did not do it to promote the artistic movement that previously gave them an identity. They merely adhered to a political ideology completely disrupted from the original artistic manifesto. And, as in most cases, the ideology happened to be the communist one. Subsequently, the relationship between the government and these individuals converted into political actors suffered a fundamental mutation: in the 1930s, many Romanian avant-gardists came to the attention of the *Siguranța*.

Thus, the Romanian political police (acting through its head at that time, Eugen Cristescu) sent a telegram in 1934 to all regional police inspectors requesting them to take action to ban and prevent the distribution in the country of the *Commune* magazine edited by the *Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires* (AEAR-Paris), and of the pamphlets entitled “Des Amendes” (Paris), “La lutte de l’URSS pour la paix mondiale” (Paris 1934, authors: J. Stalin, V. Molotov, M. Litvinov) and “Le travail des cellules d’Usines” (Les publications révolutionnaires, Paris).²⁴ The purposes of the association, as stated in a copy of the Rules of the *AEAR* sent to Professor Petre Constantinescu in Romania and intercepted by the *Siguranța*, included:

- a) Organizing writers (of fiction and science criticism) and artists, workers and professionals, for actual participation in the class war in close cooperation with the revolutionary workers’ organizations in France and the colonies, by systematically working with the worker and farmer contributors to the revolutionary press and with the Marxist circles, with the workers’ groups in the fields of theater, cinematography, photography, and radio, etc. b) Fighting against all forms of bourgeois ideology, fascism,

²³ For the concept of *partiinost*, see Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (New York: Norton, 2005), 848; for Lenin’s insistence to preserve party-mindedness in all cultural endeavors, see Tamás Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015), 129–139.

²⁴ See The Central National History Archives (hereinafter referred to as ANIC), fond 50, Dosar Nr. 1216 – Intelighenția Occidentală, Telegrama cifrată Nr. 25516/27.03.1934.

down to social fascism; inducing the nonconformist writers and artists to take a stand and to become partners to the proletariat by adopting the political form of the UIER [The International Union of Revolutionary Writers, founded in the Soviet Union]; c) Creating and developing a proletarian art and literature by adopting the dialectical materialism as its basis; d) Organizing rallies, contests, conferences, exhibitions, publications, etc., as well as any other forms of activity consistent with this purpose based on the national and international proportion; e) Promoting the formation of a national federation of the revolutionary proletarian culture and, until [the creation of] such organization, accepting and coordinating the efforts of the already existing cultural groups.²⁵

In the context of such regimentation, the international congresses of “antifascist-communist” writers were no longer attended by “avant-gardists” or other representatives of various cultural and artistic movements. They were “communists” or communist sympathizers (the difference in label is relevant for this transfer of identity that we referred to above as being paradigmatic of the transition—understood as a breakaway—from the sphere of art to that of politics). Such a congress took place in 1935, in Paris, and the Romanian secret police had all the details about the event. Major personalities of the international culture were among the participants: Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw, Aleksei Tolstói, John Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, Kostas Varnalis, etc. “Public events” of this kind often occasioned settling accounts even within the same artistic family—although it was clear that what had previously united them under the umbrella of the artistic manifesto was now dividing them, under the influence of a powerful argument: political ideology. At the 1935 congress, Louis Aragon (the leader of the *AEAR*, but still a promoter of Surrealism) was confronted by his former comrade, André Breton, as the latter chose to publicly support Victor Serge (Victor Lvovich Kibalchich), a Russian

²⁵ ANIC, fond 50, Dosar Nr. 1216 – Intelighenția Occidentală, “Statutul Asociației Scriitorilor și Artiștilor Revoluționari de la Paris,” November 11th, 1934.

writer and former Comintern journalist associated with the Trotskyist left-wing opposition.²⁶

The Romanian Siguranța also obtained detailed information concerning the relationship between Louis Aragon and Victor Brauner, and, through him, with many other Romanian communist writers regarded by the authorities in Bucharest as a branch of the French *AEAR*.²⁷ With the benefit of hindsight, we realize that the political oppression against the cultural promoters had nothing to do with the substance of their artistic manifestos, but rather with their social option. The government did not see their works, paintings and other artistic creations as a threat, but was concerned with their actual anti-establishment actions. In a way, “Dada represented organized anarchy, Surrealism was a one-man authoritarianism.”²⁸ Nevertheless, the interest in the tumultuous relationship between avant-garde artists and politics was not generated by some significant results that their actions would ever had. As a matter of fact, the avant-gardists never changed the course of any major political event, in Romania or elsewhere. Of interest however were their polemical writings (the manifestos) and the attempt to associate their moral and intellectual pursuits with the aims and methods of communist internationalism.

There were several important reasons that prevented the avant-gardists (and especially the surrealists) from projecting their metaphysical ambitions into social terms. First, they believed that poetry (in particular) was no longer a skill of the few, a means of expression, but an activity of the mind accessible to everyone: a poetic communism. Thus, poetry was taken down from the realm of abstraction to the vernacular of pure desire. However, in the early 1920s, although it had already become a leitmotif in the avant-garde writings, the word “revolution” did not have those political connotations yet: “The immediate meaning and purpose of the Surrealist revolution is not as much to change the manifest and physical order of things, but to create a state of agitation in people’s minds.”²⁹

²⁶ For Serge, see Susan Weissman, *Victor Serge: A Political Biography* (London: Verso, 2013).

²⁷ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Louis Aragon, Nr. 27653, f. 3.

²⁸ Peter Gay, *Modernism*, 145.

²⁹ Maurice Nadeau, *Documents Surréalistes* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1947), 44.

But it was that very “state of agitation” that actually worried the authorities, including the Romanian ones, not the number or organizational potential of those who conveyed such messages. Although officially established as a political party in 1921, the Romanian communists were banned on July 28, 1924. This immediately triggered an unprecedented radicalization in the position of the pro-Soviet communists, culminating with the peasants’ armed rebellion at Tatarbuniar (in Southern Bessarabia, a province of the Romanian Kingdom at the time), the declared objective of which was to put an end to the Romanian occupation in Bessarabia. One has to keep in mind two features of Bessarabia’s status in interwar Romania. On the one hand, for most Romanian rule over this territory, the authorities implemented a state of emergency triggered by the fear of Bolshevik infiltration. This situation generated the abuse of the local population and of minorities (e.g., Jews or Ukrainians).³⁰ On the other hand, the Romanian Communist Party, echoing the stand taken by the Bolsheviks, considered post-1918 Romania “a prison of nations”—a case of local imperialism suppressing small nations’ self-determination, such as what Moscow considered “the Moldavians.”³¹

To stifle the Bolshevik-backed uprising, the Brătianu government deployed artillery troops from the 3rd Romanian Army Corps in the area, as well as a navy unit. Therefore, it had become almost impossible for the Romanian authorities to see the subtle differences between the communists of various orientations, the artists sympathizing with the communist internationalism, and other categories of agitators. In this troubled political context, the oppression unleashed by the *Siguranța* against any person that allegedly had or may have had any connections with the communist underground was justified as “a matter of national security.” The transnational poetic dream of territo-

³⁰ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 89–128; Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust. The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 53–92.

³¹ Igor Cașu, “Moldova under the Soviet Communist Regime: History and Memory,” in *Remembrance, History, and Justice. Coming to Terms with Traumatic Pasts in Democratic Societies*, ed. by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob (New York/Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 347–72.

rial volatility was actually the purely political background against which these avant-gardists, enthused by the communist utopia, were moving. Maybe Breton, Iancu, Tzara, Naum (and others) were not interested in matters of imperative, revolutionary objectives. However, their remote association to the Byzantine maneuvers and schemes of the Bolsheviks could not go unnoticed by the authorities of the time. This explains the intensity of the Siguranța surveillance of the unabashedly pro-Soviet avant-garde groups.³²

The ideas of these avant-gardists and their artistic credo were gradually directed towards the communist political ideology. As they were willing to change the world by conceptually transforming the reality, they did not always realize that these ideas had palpable consequences. And when they realized it, the avant-gardists either returned to the non-political version of their beliefs or completely renounced the initial artistic commitment in order to become true political militants. For instance, André Breton “could never forget that their stress of freedom in every aspect of life was incompatible with censorship and the other constraints of Stalinism.” He therefore broke with communism. Or, at the other pole, Louis Aragon, who in spite of obvious murderous Stalinist politics, became a party leader and propagandist.³³ Because of the different reactions to Stalinism, the split within European surrealist movements could not be avoided.

The case of one of the most important representatives of Romanian and Western Surrealism—Gellu Naum—is paradigmatic. In 1934, Naum (who studied philosophy from 1933 to 1937) was member in “Amicii U.R.S.S.” (Friends of the USSR), a cultural association populated by left-wing (antifascist) intellectuals who wanted to strengthen

³² For the political culture of the underground CP of Romania, see the chapter “A Messianic Sect,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 37–84; for the Hungarian case, see Julius Hay, *Born 1900*, foreword by Arthur Koestler (Open Court La Salle, Ill: A Library Press Book, 1975); for the Polish case, see Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

³³ Renée Riese Hubert, “Surrealism,” in Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 121.

the relations with the Soviet Union (although, as we mentioned earlier, the Romanian Kingdom was not on the best diplomatic terms with its eastern neighbor). Financed by the Comintern, this association was also banned on November 25th, 1934, by the Gheorghe Tătărescu government—a consequence of the failure by the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, to reach a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union.³⁴ However, the group that frequented the “Amicii” included remarkable intellectuals of the Romanian interwar period: linguist Iorgu Iordan, political pamphleteer N. D. Cocea, journalist Alexandru Sahia, lawyer and legal philosopher Petre Pandrea, Marxist political thinker and militant Tudor Bugnariu, painter and essayist Marcel Iancu, writer and journalist Zaharia Stancu, poet Demostene Botez, and many others. Also in 1934, Gellu Naum planned to distribute to students and workers, as editor, *Tânăra Generație*³⁵ (“The Young Generation,” a newspaper considered subversive by the Siguranța). On December 29, 1934, he was true to his word. At the Grivița Railways Workshop, he handed copies of the paper, to each worker who was coming to or leaving from work.³⁶

To understand the anxiety of the authorities, we need to remember that one year earlier, on February 16, 1933, Romania had experienced the largest workers’ protests in its history. Due to deplorable working conditions and low wages (also as a consequence of the Great Depression), the railway workers at Grivița had violently clashed with the riot police. The conflict resulted in many injuries and several deaths. It should also be mentioned that the trade union at the Grivița Workshops had been penetrated and therefore manipulated by communists who, immediately after 1945, did not hesitate to turn the strike at Grivița into one of the focal points of their propaganda. In January 1935, the Siguranța analyzed the content of *Tânăra Generație*

³⁴ In 1936, Titulescu agreed with Litvinov, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the general principles of a pact between Romania and the USSR. He did not however obtain from Litvinov *de jure* recognition of Romania’s sovereignty over Bessarabia. Titulescu would soon be dismissed by King Carol II. Dennis Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940–44* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 9–10.

³⁵ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507, f. 7.

³⁶ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507, f. 8.

newspaper and the conclusions of the authorities are recorded in the same archival documents: "It contains the usual communist theories about class warfare, but the language is moderate, a fact explained by the communists' change of tactical approach, as well as by their intention to maintain the possibility of publishing a legal newspaper to be distributed to the working masses."³⁷ (The language was so moderate that the word "socialist" disappeared completely).³⁸ After only two issues, the newspaper was banned by an order of the Ministry of the Interior, in February 1935, and consequently became clandestine.³⁹

Gellu Naum was arrested on December 27, 1935, under the accusation of having been caught writing "communist slogans" on the walls of buildings in Dr. Sergiu Street, Dr. Felix Street and Al. I. Cuza Boulevard. A note to the Royal Chief Superintendent specified that Naum was not at his first arrest and that the police were aware that he belonged to the clandestine organization of communist students.⁴⁰ Later, in 1938, Gellu Naum went to Paris to complete his philosophy studies at the Sorbonne (encouraged by Victor Brauner) and met the group of André Breton and other seasoned surrealists. Upon his return to Romania in late 1939, together with Gherasim Luca, he created a surrealist circle in Bucharest. However, "this belated Eastern European surrealist group was not simply a carbon copy of its Parisian counterpart."⁴¹ Naum stayed in Bucharest during communism and, in order to survive, resorted to publishing mainly children's books and translations (Char, Beckett, Kafka, Diderot, Stend-



Fig. 1. Mug shot of Gellu Naum taken after his arrest by the *Siguranța*. (Photo: CNSAS).

³⁷ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507, f. 14.

³⁸ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507, f. 17.

³⁹ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507, f. 19.

⁴⁰ ANIC, fond 95, Dosar personal Gellu Naum, Nr. 13507/6470, f. 7.

⁴¹ See Monique Yaari, "The Surrealist Group of Bucharest: Collective Works, 1945–1947," in Quinney, ed., *Paris–Bucharest*, 98.

hal). He was also banned from traveling abroad for a full quarter-century. In contrast, his friend/colleague Virgil Teodorescu would “walk the line between autonomy versus conformity in his artistic production” and benefit from the spoils of such compromise.⁴²

Naum’s post-1948 comeback as a surrealist poet in a socialist realist literary landscape was remarkable. He never made peace with the “sinister” 1950s, but continued to survive as a poet in some sort of a parallel life, filled with remorse, disappointments, and nostalgia for the lost times of artistic freedom. In a way, he felt as tongue-tied and paralyzed as he had been during the early 1940s when he “was drafted, and profoundly traumatized by the experience of the war seen up close from another angle.”⁴³ He also felt trapped, or better said unable to escape his antifascist youth or the myths of the Western Leftism. While Romanian communist literary critics regarded him with suspicion as a “bird singing in a cage,” Gellu Naum continued to write about the ideals of an entire generation and about what a genuine leftist literature should look like. His work under communism represented a reassessment of the second wave of the avant-garde in that he tried to touch upon old language experiences in order to “normalize” and make them plausible in the new ideological context (much like poet Nichita Stănescu). In spite of a few minor—and to some extent understandable—compromises after 1948 (his “socialist realist parenthesis”), Naum’s postcommunist return to prominence as the most important local surrealist lyricist is congruent with both his poetic quality and morally uncompromising nature.⁴⁴

In a sense, Gellu Naum remained faithful to what he perceived as the true revolutionary literature. Following André Breton’s artistic credo to the letter, Naum maintained his surrealist drive undiluted. Romanian-Jewish theater director David Esrig remembered him as influenced by Antonin Artaud’s (the French theoretician banned in communist Romania) iconoclastic approach toward literature. In the same vein, when the ideological distinctions between various literary

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism: 1948–1964*, Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2010).

genres had been blurred enough, Gellu Naum would become a constant inspiration and reference point for the Romanian generation of postmodernists of the 1980s (especially to poet Alexandru Mușina and the “Brașov Group”). After 1989, Gellu Naum was finally recognized and revered as “the missing link” with a much-acclaimed interwar generation of avant-garde poets, novelists, and literary critics.

Naum’s life story is relevant not just for explaining the avatars of Romanian literature after 1948, but also for illustrating the fractured and many times tortuous relationship between arts and politics in a century ravaged by ideological storms. Had communism not tried to subordinate literature, art, and science to the dogmatic imperatives of the Bolshevik gospel, many intellectuals would have found it easier to breathe and even to avoid so-called contradictory situations. This paradox was meaningfully expressed by André Breton in his response to his former friend Aragon when he said that “the shameful word ‘engagement,’ which has become popular since the war, stinks of a servility which art and poetry abhor.”⁴⁵ As for Gellu Naum, we can now say that the ideological storms kept him in some self-imposed harbor until 1989. Such life shattering events had political repercussions that are beyond the scope of this chapter. We would never be able to fully grasp the meanings of such paradigmatic lives unless we try to deconstruct and make sense of the canvas of apostasy related to disenchanted intellectuals. Gellu Naum was a tortured soul, for at the crossroads of art and politics lies a deep, irreconcilable tension between “subjective” and “objective,” between what is in store for each of us as natural and what falls upon us with proclaimed historical inevitability. He never made peace with such a “necessity,” and turned his despondency in a poetic art which transcended different epochs of political regimentation.

⁴⁵ André Breton in March 1948, quoted by Jean Galtier-Boissière, *Mon journal dans la Grande Pagaie* (Paris: La Jeune Parque, 1950), 212.

Conclusion

The Bolshevik tendencies of some major figures of the surrealist movement were ambiguous. They had their share of doubts about communism; they followed separate paths from party politics,⁴⁶ or became allies depending on the sequence of events. It was the period that brought about the fall of the Weimar Republic, the Spanish Civil War and the Moscow show trials through which Stalin eliminated his political opponents. One is therefore tempted to conclude, as one Romanian historian did, that: “Seized by the political turmoil, the surrealism of the 1930s, compared to the 1920s, lives less on aesthetic experiences, on challenges and defiance. It looks dated, consumed, exhausted, and harassed by its own visions and schisms. In fact, the war puts an end to this experience and turns it into a chapter for art history handbooks.”⁴⁷ However, during the communist period, and in self-imposed solitude, Gellu Naum continued his quest for a poetic absolute still rooted in surrealism. And even though he did not attempt, at any point, to gather around him left-wing artists seeking artistic experimentation, his voice, albeit singular, remained devoted to the aesthetic ideals of his interwar socialization.

In the 1960s, poet Miron Radu Paraschivescu, a veteran Marxist intellectual started an avant-garde magazine, published as a supplement to a cultural journal (“Povestea vorbei,” in the monthly *Ramuri*, in the city of Craiova). Among its contributors were members of the “oneiric school,”⁴⁸ including Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag,

⁴⁶ For instance, André Breton launched in 1930 the second essential proclamation of the movement (“Second manifeste du surréalisme”), a document that actually eliminates from the great family the surrealists who hesitated to embrace “collective action” with all its good and bad things: Raymond Queneau, André Masson, Robert Desnos, and others. Later, these “dissidents” from the initial movement joined “lock, stock and barrel” the editor of the surrealist art magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille.

⁴⁷ Tănase, *Avangarda românească*, 42.

⁴⁸ See Leonid Dimov and Dumitru Țepeneag, *Onirismul estetic* (Buharest: Curtea Veche, 2007). The name of the circle came from the Greek word “Ονειροί” (dream). The ideological hacks resented the experimental style and the implicit call for freedom associated with this trend. On Miron Radu Paraschivescu and Dumitru Țepeneag and their impact, see Michael Shafir,

Sebastian Reichmann, and Valery Oîşteanu. The publication of a poem by Sebastian Reichmann, a recent graduate in sociology from the University of Bucharest, led to the banning of Paraschivescu's increasingly bold challenge to the prevailing literary shibboleths. At that moment, Reichmann was living in Gellu Naum's Bucharest residence. The aging survivor of the early surrealist romance was the young poet's mentor.⁴⁹

Reflecting on the avatars of the aesthetic avant-garde and its tortuous relationship with politics, from New York and Paris to Warsaw and Bucharest, makes us realize that this is the story of what Walter Benjamin may have had in mind when he wrote about *intellectual and political constellations*.⁵⁰ In other words, it is intellectually urgent to reclaim what Hannah Arendt called "the revolutionary tradition and its lost treasure."⁵¹ Apparently, the surrealists had to dream politically—otherwise, they would not have existed. Unfortunately for their cause, they swung between the Scylla of boundless reverie and the Charybdis of Bolshevik zealotry. Moreover, they seemed to persist in cultivating a pessimism deriving from their awareness of the irreconcilable cleavage between human aspirations and their actualization. This did not prevent them, however, from frantically experimenting with visions of social transformation. At the same time, it was precisely their irrepressible pessimism that estranged them from the triumphalist and much narrower minds of the communist apparatchiks. And since "no modernist is an island entire of itself," they all had to live "within and responded to the world into which fortune had thrown them, if only, like the true radicals, to disparage its dominant features."⁵²

After the war, Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu remained in Romania, but it was only the former who maintained and preserved his surrealist roots and aesthetic credo. Although Naum took advantage

Romania: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1985), 146, 148, 168, and, respectively, 150, 168, 172.

⁴⁹ About Sebastian Reichmann, see: <http://www.cartearomaneasca.ro/catalog/autori/reichmann-sebastian/> (accessed on September 20, 2015).

⁵⁰ See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973).

⁵² Robert S. Short, "The Politics of Surrealism: 1920–36," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Left-Wing Intellectuals between the Wars) (1966): 3–25.

of the short liberalization during mid-1960s and published some of his poetry, he would enjoy full recognition only after 1989. Naum's main accomplishment was that he remained an upstanding figure of international surrealism under some of the most perplexing and inimical circumstances. In retrospect, and given his biography, we might argue that Naum never fully fell under the spell of the totalitarian temptation of communism. He had been a temporary fellow-traveler, fully conscious of his own misgivings and reluctance. His personal catalyst was Victor Brauner's influence and less so an ideologically based project. At the end of the day, he asserted his multiple (yet congruous) identities in defiance of the Stalinist logic of regimentation.

Part Three

VISIONS OF THE NATION
IN EASTERN EUROPE

DENNIS DELETANT

*Ion Antonescu:
The Temptation of Fascism*

In twentieth-century Romanian history there is no figure more controversial than Marshal Ion Antonescu. For most Western scholars, the Marshal is a war criminal, responsible for the deaths of between 250,000 and 290,000 Jews and between 10,000 and 20,000 Roma. At the same time, Antonescu's role in saving up to 375,000 Romanian Jews from deportation to Poland is acknowledged.¹ For many Romanians, Antonescu is a national hero, a brave patriot who preserved Romania as a sovereign state during the war. In defending this sovereignty, Antonescu also saved many of Romania's Jews. Admirers of Antonescu prefer to overlook, or in some cases, are ignorant of Antonescu's excesses towards the Jews and Roma.² As Vladimir Tismaneanu has argued, a "pseudo-sacred" aura surrounds Antonescu and calls to dispel it are seen by many Romanians as efforts to diminish their national dignity, to offend their sense of honor, and blacken

¹ "In 1930, Romania had been home to 756,000 Jews. At the end of World War II about 375,000 of them had survived." Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000. Published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), 289.

² Some Romanian historians take an overtly critical view of the Antonescu regime, in particular his policy towards the Jews and Romas; see Andrei Pippidi, "Miturile trecutului-Răspântia prezentului," *Xenopoliana*, vol. 1, no. 1–4 (1993): 24, and Șerban Papacostea, "Captive Clio: Romanian Historiography under Communist Rule," *European History Quarterly*, vol. 26 (1996): 203–206.

their past. "In postcommunist societies, fantasies of persecution offer immense gratification to large strata of frustrated individuals."³ The political ground upon which the Romanian view of Antonescu is advanced is nationalism; the version vigorously promoted by communist propaganda under Nicolae Ceaușescu. His regime added to the time-honored symbols of the Romanian nation the figure of Ion Antonescu, who was cultivated because of his anti-Soviet policy. In the eyes of the Romanian public Antonescu soon became the symbol of the struggle against communism and the Soviet Union, as well as of the general aspiration for a Romanian recovery of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina.

Since the overthrow of Ceaușescu, the case of Antonescu has remained a political matter and only at a secondary level an historical one.⁴ Exaltation of Antonescu and exaggeration of his political merits, combined with a minimalization of his responsibility for the death of more than 250,000 Jews, have been used as a weapon of propaganda by those who invoke patriotism in the name of nationalism against both constitutional monarchy and democratic forces in general.⁵ Nationalist politicians such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor have striven to exploit sympathy for Antonescu as a weapon against King Michael, who was accused of having ordered the Marshal's arrest and handover to the Soviets, thereby becoming the moral perpetrator of Antonescu's conviction and execution.

Romanian historians are agreed on certain facets of Antonescu's character. All recognize his devotion to Romania and the word *patriot* is commonly used to describe him. Yet, the use of this word is, in Antonescu's case, inappropriate. Antonescu is invoked as a "patriot"

³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 92, 95.

⁴ This is amply demonstrated by Michael Shafir, "Memory, Memorials, and Membership: Romanian Utilitarian Anti-Semitism and Marshal Antonescu," in *Romania since 1989. Politics, Economics and Society*, ed. by Henry F. Carey (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 67–96.

⁵ I use the term "nationalism" in the sense of nationalism which is exclusive and rejects anything compatible with liberal institutions. See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 37. Also Papacostea, "Captive Clio," 203–206.

when he would be better described as a “chauvinist.” Patriotism is often confused with chauvinism in the mind of the same person. You can be a patriot and, at least culturally speaking, cosmopolitan. Antonescu was not cosmopolitan, he had little time for Romania’s minorities. Patriotism is not necessarily racist, as chauvinism has to be. A patriot will not exclude a person of a different race from the community in which they have lived together and whom he has known for years; but a chauvinist will always harbor suspicions towards someone who seems not to belong to the same community as he/she does, or rather, does not think in the same way as he/she does. This was the mind-set of Antonescu.⁶ Even so, being a chauvinist (or “patriot”) does not excuse war crimes; being a “patriotic” war criminal hardly constitutes grounds for entry into the gallery of a nation’s heroes.

A second quality attributed by Romanian historians to Antonescu was his sense of “honor.” Few students of Romania would dispute this appreciation. And yet Antonescu’s sense of honor made him inflexible and rigid. Romania under Antonescu was led into a war on the basis of his word of honor to Hitler and was expected to stay in the war—in the view advanced by Antonescu in his last meeting with King Michael on 23 August 1944—as long as honor required it.⁷ It is as an example of patriotism and honor that Antonescu is advanced by some nationalists as a model for Romanian society today. And yet, the example even in these two respects is flawed. He has no credentials as a model for a democratic Romania and while it was not he who introduced the policy of ethnic intolerance and persecution into Romania, it was he who extended it. Romanian nationalists deny this and seek to whitewash their country’s record under Antonescu’s rule.⁸

In 1991, on the eve of the anniversary of Antonescu’s execution as a war criminal on June 1, 1946, the Romanian parliament stood for one minute in silent tribute. The reaction of the Romanian authorities

⁶ John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 50, 124, and 127.

⁷ Adrian Cioroianu, “Antonescu între Hitler și...Ceașescu,” *Dosarele Istoriei*, no.6 (2002): 59.

⁸ As demonstrated by Randolph L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts* (New York: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1998), 289.

to the invitation launched by nine Romanian foundations and societies to King Michael to attend a symposium, held in Bucharest on October 8–9, 1994, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of King Michael's coup and his arrest of Antonescu on August 23, 1944, said much about their values. Whilst granting Antonescu's *chef de cabinet* a visa to participate in the anniversary symposium, President Iliescu saw fit to deny one to King Michael, the author of the coup against Antonescu.

A flawed understanding of Antonescu was in evidence in early 2012, when Dan Şova, then spokesman of the Romanian Social Democratic Party, claimed on the Money Channel on March 5 that “no Jew suffered on Romanian territory, thanks to Marshal Antonescu.” This remark was met with indignation from the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. On March 7, the chairman of the party, Victor Ponta, announced that Dan Şova had been “temporarily” removed from the office of spokesperson of the party. Şova later expressed regret that his statement had been misunderstood, but refused to apologize. On August 6, Şova was appointed as the minister for parliamentary relations in the Ponta government.

Ion Antonescu was Romania's ruler from September 6, 1940 to August 23, 1944, the period of Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany and the consequent invasion of the Soviet Union. Romania retained its sovereignty throughout the period of the alliance. Respect for Romanian sovereignty was based on the identical interests which bound Hitler and Antonescu, and on the Führer's confidence in, and admiration for, the Romanian leader.⁹ Both had seen service in World War I, albeit

⁹ Antonescu and Hitler met ten times, on November 23, 1940, January 14, 1941, June 12, 1941, August 6, 1941, February 11, 1942, January 10–12, 1943, April 12, 1943, September 2–3, 1943, March 23–24, 1944, and August 5, 1944. Mark Axworthy describes their meeting at Rastenburg on September 2–3, 1943 as “unscheduled.” Mark Axworthy, Cornel Scafeş, and Cristian Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally. Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London: Arms and Armour, 1995), 121; see also Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu. Die Deutsch-Rumänischen Beziehungen, 1938–1944* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), 173. The Romanian leader was “the first foreigner to be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, the only one to be solicited for military advice, and probably the only person—German or foreign—permitted to out-talk and contradict the Führer.” Joseph Rothschild, *East-Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Washington: Washington University Press, 1975), 317.

on opposing sides, and the Führer respected Antonescu's experience as a military planner. He also admired his leadership qualities and his dedication to the Axis. Antonescu had, of course, his own country's interests uppermost in his mind, but in following Hitler, he served the Nazi cause. He was aware of the implications of the "Final Solution" for the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe, as his meeting with Hitler at Castle Klessheim in Salzburg on April 13, 1943 indicates,¹⁰ and made his own particular contribution to the solution of the "Jewish problem" by deporting Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to Transnistria.

In the simple dichotomies of wartime and postwar evaluation, Antonescu counts as fascist. His was an authoritarian regime, which adopted some, but by no means all, of the trappings of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. He had led a "fascist" government—a judgment which automatically assimilates the Iron Guard to the dominant parties in Germany and Italy. Above all, he had been an ally of those two states. Only in the 1960s did inquiry begin to discriminate between varieties of fascism and raise questions hitherto ignored or dismissed as incompatible with the prevalent orthodoxy. But it was not until the mid-1970s that the complexity and inconsistency of his character was hinted at in Romania itself. In the 1980s, outside Romania, a discussion began that moved away from previous dogmatic interpretations of Antonescu's rule. These two approaches do more to explain his behavior than the preceding orthodoxy.

For this reason, any analysis has to begin by recognizing that Antonescu headed the third-largest Axis army in the European war: 585,000 Romanian troops participated in the attack on the Soviet Union in June–October 1941;¹¹ that under his rule Romania sustained the German war effort with oil and other raw materials, above all that he enjoyed Hitler's personal respect—all of which places Romania on a par with Italy as a principal ally of Germany and not in the category of minor Axis satellite. Antonescu was emphatically a complex and inconsistent figure. But he *inherited* the Axis alignment, which is not to say that he saw an alternative to it, and he bore no responsibility for the

¹⁰ As does that with von Ribbentrop on the following day.

¹¹ Axworthy, Scafeș, and Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 216. After Italy signed an armistice with the Allies on 8 September 1943, Romania became the second Axis power in Europe.

internal political chaos he was called upon to manage. This is a major paradox of his regime. There were others. He was a war criminal, sending tens of thousands of Jews to what he must have known would be their deaths in Transnistria through starvation, cold, and disease, and yet he refused German requests to send other Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland. He was an antisemite and yet, despite the deportations to Transnistria, more Jews survived under his rule than in any other country within Axis Europe. While up to 300,000 Jews were victims of Antonescu's policies, some 375,000 Jews are estimated to have survived, principally in Wallachia, Moldavia, and southern Transylvania.¹² He led for five months a fascist-style government, yet in January 1941 he removed that government in three days of street fighting and replaced it with a military dictatorship. These inconsistencies had been known but could not be fully explored until the downfall of communism in Romania opened archives.

Without an appreciation of Romania's predicament in 1940, caught as it was between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, a realistic evaluation of Antonescu's conduct in foreign policy is impossible. Instead, Romania is neatly pigeon-holed in the category of Axis states which attacked the Allies—in Antonescu's case, the Soviet Union—in order to expand territorially. In consequence of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union joined Germany in the invasion and partition of Poland, attacked Finland, entered the Baltic States, and took from Romania Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. These actions of Stalin conspired, in conjunction with those of Hitler, to destroy the interwar European order, replacing it by a new order in Central and Eastern Europe, one subject not to international deliberation and ratification, but to the claims or impositions articulated by Germany and the Soviet Union.¹³

Fear of the Soviet Union drove Romania into alliance with Nazi Germany. "Nothing could put Romania on Germany's side," remarked a member of the Romanian Foreign Ministry to the British Minister Sir Reginald Hoare in March 1940, "except the conviction that only

¹² Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 289.

¹³ Dennis Deletant, "The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and its Consequences for Bessarabia: Some Considerations on the Human Rights Implications," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, vol. XXX, no. 3–4 (1991): 221–22.

Germany could keep the Soviets out of Romania.”¹⁴ That conviction was quick to form after the collapse of France, the Soviet seizure of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina at the end of June 1940, and the loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary under the Vienna Award in late August 1940. One third of Romania’s 1939 area was ceded in 1940 and with it Romania’s population fell from 19.9 million to 13.3 million.¹⁵ The loss of the three territories led King Carol to accept Hitler’s frontier guarantee, one which he gave only after Carol’s agreement to the Vienna Award. The same pragmatic considerations shaped the policy of Antonescu. Although Romania lost northern Transylvania at Germany’s hands under the Award, it was only with German support that Antonescu could defend the country’s territorial integrity and regain Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from the Soviet Union.¹⁶

The Soviet threat to Romania was catalogued in the Romanian Government’s reply to the British ultimatum of November 29, 1941.¹⁷ Mention of it was suppressed during the period of communist rule in

¹⁴ Maurice Pearton, “British Policy towards Romania 1938–1941,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie ‘A.D. Xenopol,’* vol. 23, no. 2 (1986): 551.

¹⁵ By contrast, Hungary’s population grew from about 9 million in 1939 to an estimated 14.7 million in 1941, including almost 1 million Romanians (Axworthy, Scafeș, and Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 17.)

¹⁶ Antonescu’s pragmatism is noted by Franklin Mott Gunther, the American Minister in Bucharest. In a report to the US Secretary of State of February 25, 1941 he wrote: “It has always been my impression—one which has recently been confirmed, that the General’s pro-German as well as his anti-British feelings are not dictated by sentiment but solely by what he considered to be national interest and dates from Russia’s invasion into Rumania and the collapse of France.” Larry Watts, *Romanian Cassandra. Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform, 1916–1941* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1993), 380.

¹⁷ It listed:

- 1) The occupation of four islands at the mouth of the Danube in the autumn of 1940.
- 2) Daily frontier incidents involving attempts to move the frontier.
- 3) Attempts by Soviet vessels to enter Romanian waters by force in January 1941.
- 4) Incessant incursions, despite Romanian protests, into Romanian airspace amounting during April, May and June to up to seven daily over flights.
- 5) A massive concentration of Soviet military forces on the Romanian frontier made up of 30 infantry divisions, 8 cavalry divisions, and 14 motorized brigades (*Universul*, 9 December, 1941).

Romania because of Soviet sensibilities and actions. Romanian and Western scholars were prevented from having access to a significant part of the papers of Ion Antonescu, for they were removed from the Romanian archives by the Soviet authorities between 1944 and 1945 and never returned.¹⁸ Copies of some of the files from Antonescu's office remained in Romania throughout the postwar period and the Romanian authorities consistently denied access to scholars before 1989.¹⁹ As a result the Soviet authorities were in a position to dictate an image of the Antonescu regime, one which was faithfully presented by Soviet historiography as "criminal."²⁰ It is not surprising that a class analysis of politics combined with censorship should lead one Soviet historian, I. Levitsky, to argue in an article published in 1985 that the reason behind Antonescu's participation in Operation Barbarossa was the result of "the chauvinism of the Romanian ruling class."²¹ This is not to deny, of course, that the Antonescu regime was anti-Soviet.

Levitsky's condemnation of the Antonescu regime as "criminal" echoed the charges levelled against the Marshal by the Soviet authorities at the end of the war. In Britain and the United States there was widespread sympathy for the Soviet Union which had made the greatest land contribution to Hitler's defeat. This was reflected in the British press. Unfavorable comment in some British newspapers about Soviet behavior in the countries it occupied at the close of the war was discouraged until the advent of the Cold War. Romania's military effort on the Allied side after the coup of August 23, 1944 went

¹⁸ These documents are described by Gheorghe Buzatu in his *Românii în arhivele Kremlinului* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1996).

¹⁹ Including this author. Copies of correspondence from the Preşedinţia Consiliului de Miniştri (the Council of Ministers—Ion Antonescu's office) were held in the archive of the Romanian Foreign Ministry and in the State Archives, orders issued by this office to the Ministry of the Interior were held in the state security archives, and copies of orders issued to the army were held in the archive of the Ministry of National Defence.

²⁰ Examples of the Soviet view are Artem Markovich Lazarev, *Moldavs-kaya sovetskaya gosudarstvennost' i bessarabskiy vopros* (Kishinev: Cartea Moldovenească, 1974) and Iziaslav Elikovich, *Krakh politiki agresii diktatury Antonesku: 19.IX.42–23.VIII.1944* (Kishinev: Shtiintsa, 1983); see also Wim van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography* (New York: East European Monographs, 1994), 344.

²¹ van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question*, 344.

unnoticed. In a dispatch for *The Sunday Times* published on January 7, 1945 a special correspondent wrote: "It is not generally recognized that of the nations fighting Germany today in Europe, Romania comes fourth in terms of mobilized men. She has 14 divisions fighting with the Russian armies, whereas France, for instance, has only seven in the field."²²

This lack of recognition was attributable to the fact that until King Michael's coup against Antonescu, Romania had fought as an ally of Germany against the Soviet Union. In some quarters of the British Foreign Office the coup was seen as military opportunism and political expediency; joining the Allied side on the back of the Red Army in order to forestall Soviet occupation and to preserve the country's territorial integrity.²³ Had not the coup only come when the Red Army was on Romanian soil? some officials asked. In Britain especially, at the end of the war, one in which Britain had been the longest serving, and for almost two years, the sole combatant against Germany, there was little time for those who had been Hitler's associates. The Iron Curtain screened Antonescu and Romania's wartime experience from the consciousness of the Western public and the eyes of Western historians.

In Romania, political considerations after 1945 made the subject of Romania's alliance with Germany taboo. The Communist regime barred access to documents covering the years 1941–44. At the same time, the Romanian dead on the Eastern Front were denied official recognition and commemoration; the prospect of a pro-Soviet regime acknowledging casualties of an attack on the Soviet Union—the Romanian soldiers who died in the Russian campaign between 1941 and 1944—proved too embarrassing. The Military Museum in Bucharest underlined the point. Its exhibits defined the Romanian record in World War II by the years 1944–45. There was no mention of the Romanian involvement in the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, and no memorabilia of the campaign.

²² I accept that a "division" is not necessarily a safe basis for comparison, and much depends on its fire power, but the emphasis in the quotation is on "mobilized men."

²³ Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 226.

The title of the present chapter begs two questions. First, to what degree was Antonescu naturally pre-disposed towards the ideology of fascism? And, second, did he succumb to its temptation? To answer the first question an examination of his background and the milieu in which he pursued his career is required. The response to the second question lies in Antonescu's own words and deeds.

Ion Antonescu had the army in his blood. Born on 2 June 1882 into a middle-class family in the southern Romanian town of Pitești, and baptized into the Orthodox faith, his father, an army officer, mapped out a military career for him. Antonescu made a name for himself as a tactician during World War I, but his personal qualities left a different kind of impression with some of those he met. General Victor Petin, France's military attaché in Bucharest, in an assessment of Antonescu dated 21 July 1922, expressed reservations about him: "A well-tried intelligence, brutal, duplicitous, very vain, a ferocious will to succeed—these are, together with an extreme xenophobia, the striking characteristics of this strange figure."²⁴

Antisemitism was widespread and respectable amongst most Romanians. The peasants' dislike stemmed from the Jews' position as alcohol suppliers, moneylenders, and middlemen in the timber trade, while the upper classes looked upon them with suspicion. Additionally, refugees from Russia during the nineteenth century, even though in flight from pogroms, were regarded as Russians and therefore particularly unreliable. In Bessarabia the Jews remained a community apart from the Romanian peasant majority. Of the 206,958 Jews in Bessarabia in 1930, some 201,278 declared Yiddish to be their native language, while their second language of operation was invariably Russian rather than Romanian. Antisemitic feeling amongst the newly-arrived Romanian officials was exacerbated by their suspicion of the Jews as Bolshevik agents, following the influx of Jewish refugees into Bessarabia in the wake of the Russian civil war. Antonescu's career developed squarely in this milieu.

As Romania aligned herself more closely to Germany, so the position of the Jews became more precarious. The pro-German cabinet of Ion Gigurtu introduced a decree on August 9, 1940 which, by

²⁴ Valeriu Florin Dobrescu, "Documente și mărturii: Ion Antonescu văzut de contemporani," *Dosarele istoriei* 7 (2002): 6, 16.

changing the legal status of Jews and denying them civil and political rights, was a replica of Hitler's Nuremberg laws. With the accession of Antonescu and the Iron Guard to power and the proclamation of a National-Legionary state on September 14, 1940, new antisemitic measures were taken. On October 3, Jews were barred from renting pharmacies—most pharmacies were either rented or owned by Jews—and on October 5, rural real estate was expropriated from Jews, as were, on November 12, forest land, mills, distilleries, and cereal stocks, and shipping (December 4). The right of Jews to plead at the bar was limited by law to representation of their coreligionists as private persons (October 17), while Jewish doctors were allowed only to treat Jewish patients (November 15).

Under Antonescu's dictatorship the antisemitic measures were extended. It was on his orders that the Foreign Ministry advised the passport office on March 7, 1941 that thenceforth passports issued to Romanian citizens of Jewish origin should bear the inscription "Jew or Jewess" in the top left-hand corner of the first page. In an effort to rationalize Romanianization of Jewish property the government created on May 3, 1941 the National Center for Romanianization (*Centrul Național de Româнизare*). It was charged with administering the assets nationalized from the Jews, with "Romanianizing economic life," and with paying the former Jewish owners compensation totaling eight times their gross income, as established by the taxes they paid. Much of the property confiscated from Jews was let out to Romanians.

Antonescu and antisemitism

How far was Antonescu driven by personal feelings of antisemitism? One scholar has argued in respect of Antonescu that "although an anti-Semite, anti-Semitism was not one of his defining characteristics."²⁵ Yet in his correspondence and in cabinet meetings he often expressed himself in caustic antisemitic terms, ones which clearly drove his discriminatory measures. Angered by the heavy losses suffered by the Romanian army in the advance eastwards, which he attributed entirely to "the Jewish commissars" in the Red Army, Antonescu erupted

²⁵ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 376.

into a paroxysm of rage against the Jews in a directive sent to Mihai Antonescu from the front on September 5, 1941. Returning to his refrain of “purification,” he predicted that victory would allow the Axis to “cleanse” the world of Jews: “The soldiers at the front run the great risk of being wounded or killed because of the Jewish commissars, who with a diabolical perseverance drive the Russians from behind with revolvers and keep them in their positions until they die to the last man. I have found out about this and am disgusted.” He urged Mihai to re-intern the Jews from Moldavia—some of whom had been released after the advance across the Dniester—in preparation for deportation:

All the Jews should be re-interned in camps, preferably in those in Bessarabia, because I will drive them from there into Transnistria once I free myself of the present problems. Everyone should understand that it is not a matter of a struggle with the Slavs, but with the Jews. It is a struggle of life and death. . . . For us to be victorious we must be resolute. Everyone should know this. It is not economics which are paramount at this time but the will of the nation itself. That will does not depend on the thriving affairs of certain people, but on the victory of everyone against Satan. And the war in general and the battle for Odessa in particular have offered abundant proof that Satan is the Jew.²⁶

Referring again to the commissars Antonescu ranted: “He, and only he, leads the slaves like a herd of cattle and causes their death by firing the last bullet. Hence our great losses. Had the Jewish commissars not been around, we would have reached Odessa long ago.”²⁷ In his

²⁶ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [henceforth ANIC], fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri –Cabinet, file 167/1941, 64–65 (I am grateful to Viorel Achim for this source); see also the text of the directive in Jean Ancel, *Transnistria* (Bucharest: Editura Atlas 1998), vol.1, 317–18, and Lya Benjamin, “The Jews’s Image in Antonescu’s Political Texts,” in *The Holocaust in Romania. History and Contemporary Significance*, ed. by Mihail Ionescu and Liviu Rotman (Bucharest: Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, “Goldstein Goren” Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, “Goldstein Goren” Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University, 2003), 126.

²⁷ Benjamin, “The Jews’s Image,” 126.

125-page reply of October 29, 1942 to successive letters from Dinu Brătianu complaining about his conduct of the war the Marshal gives vent to his antisemitism in frequent references to the “yids” (*jidani*):²⁸

You know that I came to power in times that were most difficult and dangerous for the state and its leader; and, above all, you know that I ran and run the country without a party and party supporters, without any banking organizations, assisted only by one person, Mr Mihai Antonescu, and undermined by all the yids, all the profiteers of the old regime and the whole of finance and industry, under the patronage, both open and occult, given by you. . . .²⁹

Do not forget that during the twenty-two years of democratic regimes, the great majority of credits given by the government through the National Bank and the banks supported by the National Bank went to the yids and foreigners. . . .³⁰

The command of our forces, reinforced by a German army, will be shortly assumed by me. The honor is not mine, but it is for you all.... It is something which cannot be understood by some of the former politicians in Romania who blinded by passion, envy and self-interest—hang around street corners and with circumspection criticize pointlessly or pointedly any action good or bad, and who comment upon and spread any rumour put about by yids and perfidiously and surreptitiously stir up things.³¹

The depth of Antonescu’s antisemitism comes to the surface in the virulence of the language which he uses to describe Jews. He sees them as a “disease,” as “parasites” to be cleansed from the body of Romania. An example of this discourse is the interview given to the novelist Ion Brătescu-Voinești on March 5, 1943. Justifying his alliance with

²⁸ Romanian *jidani* is a pejorative term corresponding to English *yid* or *kike*; *evreu* is the non-racist word.

²⁹ Benjamin, “The Jews’s Image,” 275.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

Germany, he launches into a diatribe against the country's "enemies": "The Germans helped us to reconquer Bessarabia and Bukovina, they helped us to arm ourselves, to begin delousing the country of its internal enemies, the Jews, enemies whom I consider to be more poisonous than the external ones, because the latter can lead to amputation of the country's limbs, but internal enemies can poison and corrupt the soul of our people."³²

As the possibility of an Axis defeat loomed larger, the Marshal became more concerned about a reckoning at the hands of the victorious Allies for his actions against the Jews. In a meeting with finance officials on April 20, 1943, Antonescu was told that the shortage of money in circulation was because those Jews who had been "removed from normal economic life were trading, as before, without paying tax and without penalty, like Romanian traders. For this reason a large part of the money was in the hands of the Jews." The Marshal proposed an answer to this problem: "One [solution] would be the most radical: to take all the Jews and send them across the border. But we are a small country, not a big country, like Germany. I am fighting to win the war, but the democracies may happen to win it. And we know what democracy means; it means Judeocracy. So, why should I expose the future generations of the nation to punishment for my decision to expel the Jews."³³

In a meeting of the Council of Ministers of April 22, 1944, he declared angrily:

I have seen Jews with spectacles perched on their noses who pretend innocence on the street and who are undoubtedly making a mental note of everything they see and then note it down on paper. There are certainly many amongst them who are in the service of the enemy and have radio transmitters which they use to pass information on to the British and the Russians...

These wretches will pay very dearly. Furthermore, all the guides who lead the Russians through the mountains are Jews from

³² Lya Benjamin, ed., *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944, Vol. II, Problema Evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), 501–502, doc. 160.

³³ *Ibid.*, 511, doc. 166.

Târgu-Neamț and the whole region. You see what an evil race [the Jews] are and how they bring destruction upon themselves. . . .

One solution is for us to remove them from these towns and take them to others, if there are many of them. We should settle them as we did in Buhuși, in one or two market towns, move out all the Romanians, and let them live amongst themselves. . . .

The second solution is to gather them in ghettos in each town, to say to them: “this is the area where you live, do not leave it. We will bring you food, do what you want, we will not kill you, we will not harm you.”

The third solution is for us to take them from there [Bessarabia?] and bring them back. But this is the most dangerous solution and the most catastrophic for the Romanian race. I cannot bring them back. Many have escaped and I cannot bring the others as well, because I am sure that they would stone me. . . . One of these solutions must be applied.

Yet on rare occasions Antonescu was also capable of contrition. Informed about the murders of Jews in Chișinău, he revealed in a meeting of the Council of Ministers on December 4, 1941 that: “It was the greatest disappointment, I can say, in my career, that there could take place what took place under my regime, and that my regime could be stained by such bastards, like other regimes. The matter is all the more painful since many soldiers are involved.”³⁴

Antonescu and Corneliu Codreanu

The Iron Guard (*Garda de Fier*) was the military wing of The Legion of the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*), a messianic ultra-nationalist movement founded in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea

³⁴ Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și Evrei. Cazurile Dorohoi, București, Iași, Odessa* (Bucharest: RAO, 1998), 318. Benjamin, ed. *Evreii din România, vol. II*, doc.123, p. 348.

Codreanu. The Guard—I shall use this shorthand term—is seen as one of the most complex and unusual varieties of fascism in Europe for the following reasons. First, it originated independently of Italian fascism and German National Socialism. Second, it was among the few movements of the extreme right in Central Europe—along with the Ustasha Movement in Croatia and the Arrow Cross in Hungary—to acquire a mass character. Third, the Guard was the only mass fascist movement in an Orthodox country. In a sense, the Guard was much more akin to the Russian *narodniki* than to any western model. In 1937, it claimed some 270,000 members, it polled 478,000 votes in the December 1937 parliamentary elections—16 per cent of the electorate—winning 66 seats in parliament. Finally, the Guard combined fascist characteristics with particular ideological features such as religious faith and mysticism. In this respect the Guard sits uneasily in a “fascist” context, if only, as one scholar has put it, “in that Codreanu’s theories were derived from the Book of Revelation. He made a practice of going up in the mountains to pray, something that Hitler and Mussolini were not known to have done.”³⁵

Codreanu conceived of the Guard’s programme like a monastic order. It was endowed with a spiritual mission to change Romanians by creating “the new man,” one bent on social justice. There was no place for the bourgeoisie. His opposition to democracy was expressed in a virulent antisemitism. The Guard’s articles of faith dictated a pathological hatred of Jews whom Codreanu saw as the fount of Communism. The Guard drew much of its appeal from Codreanu’s charisma and the genesis of that charisma was a vision that Codreanu had on November 8, 1923 whilst in prison for organizing a plot to shoot politicians who had supported an amendment to the Romanian constitution granting Jews the right to citizenship. He claimed that the Archangel Michael had appeared to him, urging him to dedicate his life to God. Proclaiming the archangel as patron and symbol, Codreanu founded, in July 1927, the Legion of the Archangel Michael. The particular inspiration for Codreanu’s charismatic revelation was an icon of Saint Michael in a Bucharest monastery in which the archangel is depicted in a punitive posture, wielding a sword in one hand, and holding scales of justice in the other. It was in this mould that Saint Michael became the

³⁵ I am grateful to Maurice Pearton for this phrasing.

object of a fanatic cult. His saint's day—8 November—was the official celebration of the Legion.

In interwar Romania disillusion with the failure of parliamentary government—dominated by the National Liberal and National Peasant parties—to solve economic problems fuelled support for the Guard. The latter promised spiritual regeneration and to combat “Jewish Bolshevism.” It was Codreanu who inspired the Guard with his invectives against what he saw as “the Judeo-Bolshevik” threat, against the drive for modernization through imitation of Western political and economic institutions, and against a corrupt ruling elite. The symbiotic relationship between Legionary aspirations to bring about national spiritual rebirth and a “new man” and an antisemitism in which the Jew symbolized and “condensed” paradoxical aspects of the decadence which threatened this project, has been examined in a recent masterful study.³⁶ Through this powerful mythopoeic process rooted in a long Romanian and European history of antisemitism, “the liminoid forces of anomie, ambivalence and chaos endemic to modernity, but experienced particularly intensely for concrete historical reasons by the Romanian intelligentsia, were embodied in a single social issue and human cause which made them intelligible and resolvable even to the satisfaction of major intellectuals such as Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade.”³⁷

The growing popular support for Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and the violence of his antisemitic Iron Guard made it inevitable that it should attract Antonescu's attention. Whilst Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff in 1933, Antonescu had ordered the Military Intelligence to prepare a study of the Guard and its leader in order to evaluate its influence within the army. Antonescu's marginal notes on the report are revealing for his thoughts on the Guard at that time. To Codreanu's boast that “in a single night anyone can make a [political] program and it is not them for which the country feels a need, but for the men and the will to

³⁶ Raul Cârstocea, *The Role of Anti-Semitism in the Ideology of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (1927–1938)*, University College, London, PhD thesis, defended 20 October 2011.

³⁷ I am grateful to Roger Scruton for this phrasing. For further analysis of the relationship between the Guard and interwar intellectuals, especially Cioran and Eliade, see Vladimir Tismaneanu's contribution in this volume.

fulfill them,” Antonescu added: “Not serious. It is not possible to improvise the program of the simplest family farm in a single night, let alone that of a body as vast as the modern state.”³⁸ Where Antonescu did have common ground with Codreanu was in seeing the Jews as a threat, but not—at this stage—in the method of dealing with it. When Codreanu described the Guard as “defending Romania from the peril which is presented by the ever-growing invasion of the Jews,” Antonescu remarked: “Through the organization of the Romanian classes, and not through the brutal measures for which everyone clamours.”³⁹

A shared distrust of King Carol, and an intensive dislike for his mistress and confidante Elena Lupescu, and fawning counsellor Ernest Urdăreanu led Antonescu to bow to the arguments of two of his friends, General Zizi Cantacuzino and engineer Nicolae Măreș to meet Codreanu for the first time, in 1936. Antonescu found the Iron Guard leader arrogant—Antonescu was hardly noted for his humility—but committed to a purge of the political system.⁴⁰ On July 24, Armand Călinescu, the Minister of Internal Affairs, noted: “My informers tell me that a representative of Codreanu was received by General Ion Antonescu at Pitești who greeted him with the words: ‘with all my achievements and symbols of rank, I cry out today: Long live the Captain.’”⁴¹

On February 20, 1938, Carol abolished the 1923 constitution and instituted a royal dictatorship. It required the dissolution of all political parties. To Carol’s surprise, Codreanu acquiesced without demur. On the following day, Codreanu dissolved the “All for the Country” Party and called upon the Iron Guard to disband until “the true King”—Carol II’s son Michael—ascended the throne. In his address to the movement and the public he gave his reasons:

³⁸ Quoted from Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 144.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁰ *Pe marginea prăpastiei*, vol.1 (Bucharest: Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, 1942), 31. The two volumes provide a documentary account of Iron Guard excesses and atrocities during the period of Antonescu’s joint rule with the guard between September 1940 and January 1941. They were first published after the suppression of the Iron Guard rebellion on Antonescu’s orders, withdrawn after German complaints, and re-issued in 1942 when Antonescu discovered fresh evidence of Iron Guard conspiracies against him.

⁴¹ The nickname for Codreanu. Valeriu Florin Dobrinescu and Gheorghe Nicolescu, *Plata și răsplata istoriei. Ion Antonescu, militar și diplomat (1914–1940)* (Iași: Institutul European, 1994), 59.

We do not wish to provoke force. We do not wish to attract violence. We have learned from our past experience when, contrary to our wishes, we were drawn down the path of violence. We will not respond to violence in any way, we will bear it. . . . We do not want a *coup d'état*. . . . Our generation sees very well that the gauntlet has been thrown down. That gauntlet, however, will remain on the ground. We refuse to pick it up. The hour of our triumph has not come. It is still their hour.⁴²

Without a motive for moving against the Guard, Călinescu, with Carol's agreement, invented one. Nicolae Iorga, the eminent historian and editor of *Neamul Românesc*, ran a campaign attacking the Guard for its creation of workers' canteens and shops. Codreanu responded with a letter accusing him of "spiritual dishonor." Iorga demanded satisfaction over the insult.⁴³ At a cabinet meeting on March 28, Călinescu recommended that Codreanu be tried for libel. Antonescu protested that such action was an abuse of power and resigned the next day.⁴⁴

Călinescu was relentless in his pursuit of Codreanu. On April 16, he ordered his arrest and in a lightning trial of three days Codreanu was convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment for libel. On April 18, the first day of the trial, the press announced that Antonescu was to be pensioned off. One month later, on May 17, charges of treason were brought against Codreanu. Both Antonescu and Maniu appeared as witnesses for the defence in Codreanu's second trial, before a military tribunal. A dramatic account of Antonescu's behavior was given by an American journalist, Countess R.G. Waldeck: "While the courtroom waited with baited breath, Antonescu was asked whether he considered Codreanu a traitor. Standing erect, the General

⁴² Ibid., 173.

⁴³ Ioan Scurtu, *Viața politică din România, 1918–1940* (Bucharest: Editura Litera, 1982), 216.

⁴⁴ His letter of resignation is reproduced in Ion Ardeleanu and Vasile Arimia, *Ion Antonescu. Citiți, judecați, cutremurați-vă* (Bucharest: Tinerama, 1991), 39–50. Călinescu claimed to have recommended Antonescu's appointment as military attaché in Paris to Carol but the King rejected the idea. See Armand Călinescu, *Insemnări politice, 1916–1939* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 381.

marched over to the accused *Căpitanul*,⁴⁵ held out his hand simply for Codreanu's and pressed it. 'Would General Antonescu give his hand to a traitor?', he demanded of the silent courtroom."⁴⁶

In his statement to the court on behalf of Codreanu Antonescu declared:

From the conversations that I had with Mr Codreanu I noted that he was not preoccupied with accession to power but by the country's affairs and he claimed to me that he was not yet prepared for government.... If I had noticed something suspicious in the accused in that he intended a revolt, I would not have talked to him. In respect of the arms, I told the accused to hand them over to the military authorities.... I cannot say whether the All for the Country Party is good or bad as I am a soldier. From the information that I had I cannot believe that the accused would be capable of treason.⁴⁷

Hoare, too, was unconvinced by the evidence of Codreanu's treason but despite this, and the support of Antonescu and Maniu, the "Captain" was convicted and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Antonescu was placed under house arrest at his home in Predeal on Carol's orders but when a French journalist managed to interview him, he was recalled to active service and assigned to the Third Army Corps in the Bessarabian capital Chişinău, well out of the way of foreign newspapermen and diplomats. In a memorandum to Carol, Antonescu explained his behavior towards Codreanu. Reminding him that he had

⁴⁵ *Căpitanul*, "the Captain," is the literary form in Romanian.

⁴⁶ R.G. Waldeck, *Athene Palace Bucharest* (London: Constable, 1943), 86. Note the use of the third person by Antonescu when referring to himself. According to Hoare, Maniu testified "that although there was a great difference between his own political conceptions and those of Codreanu he was of the opinion that a nation could not exist without a solid basis of Christian morality, and this he had found in Codreanu . . . , that in all the conversations which he had had with the accused the latter had never suggested that he was in a hurry to assume office; that he would never have negotiated with a man who was planning revolt and that in his opinion the Iron Guard was neither secret nor clandestine." (Quoted from Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 175).

⁴⁷ ANIC, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, Trial of Ion Antonescu, file 40010, vol.3, p. 96.

negotiated with the King's knowledge with Codreanu to persuade him to withdraw from the electoral campaign at the beginning of February, Antonescu told Carol that he had given Codreanu his word that he would come to his aid "should his fate be left to the total discretion of the authorities." Codreanu had accepted that word.⁴⁸

Antonescu and the National Legionary State

The argument has been made by some Romanian historians that Antonescu and the Iron Guard were brought to power under German pressure.⁴⁹ This is overstating the case. At no time did any German official call for Carol's abdication, even during the crucial events of September 3–6, 1940.⁵⁰ The King's alignment with the Reich at the beginning of July won him the favor of Hitler, as pointed out in August by Hermann Neubacher, the German Special Representative for Economic Problems to a Romanian military representative, when he assured him that both the Führer and Foreign Minister Ribbentrop were adamant that Carol should remain King and lead the country, "otherwise," as Neubacher put it, "the country would be exposed to anarchy."⁵¹ Certainly, a withdrawal of German support was instrumental in leading Carol to abdicate, but it was the mood of the Romanian population that proved decisive. The protests against Carol in response to his supine surrender of territory during the summer, culminating in a huge demonstration of some 100,000 people in front of the palace on the night of September 5, left Wilhelm Fabricius, the German minister to Bucharest, in no doubt that the King had lost the confidence of his people and even made him fearful for Carol's safety.⁵²

By the same token, there is no evidence that Hitler or any of his senior Nazi Party colleagues sought an exclusively Legionary gov-

⁴⁸ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 176.

⁴⁹ Aurel Simion, *Regimul Politic din România în perioada sept. 1940–ian. 1941* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1976), 9–34.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Haynes, "Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940," *The Slavonic and East European Review* vol.77 (October 1999): 704

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 703.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 714.

ernment. They preferred a coalition of Carol, a disciplined legionary movement, and other pro-German elements.⁵³ This approach was signalled by Hitler in late July when the Romanian minister in Berlin reported his comment that the German government would welcome greater participation in the Romanian government from “nationalist” elements, such as the Iron Guard, and those who were friendly to the Reich, such as Gheorghe Brătianu. While there was a widespread belief in Romania at the time that the Guard had full German backing, research has shown that support for it from either the German state or the Nazi Party was minimal.⁵⁴ The Iron Guard was only one of the components which Hitler wished to see in the Romanian government, while Fabricius did not consider it ready for office at all.⁵⁵ Although the German legation in Bucharest and consulates in Romania received requests from the Guard to engineer Carol’s abdication on September 3, Fabricius received no authority from Berlin either to act in this regard, or to work for the installation of an Iron Guard government.⁵⁶

In fact, Carol, after attempting to eradicate the Guard in the aftermath of Codreanu’s murder in November 1938, and again following the assassination of prime minister Armand Călinescu in September 1939, had moved towards reconciliation with the Guard during the early months of 1940. He was attracted by their motto “God, Nation, and King” which he hoped to use to bolster his own position, but of greater importance to him were the military successes of Germany and its reputed backing of the Guard. On May 26, Codreanu’s successor Horia Sima, freshly returned from Germany, saw Mihai Moruzov, head of the Romanian Intelligence Service, who told him of the King’s wish to align Romania’s policy with Germany and his wish for reconciliation with the Guard.⁵⁷ On June 13, Sima gave his approval to

⁵³ Ibid., 703.

⁵⁴ Armin Heinen, *Die Legion ‘Erzengel Michael’ in Rumänien: Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1986), 322–45.

⁵⁵ Haynes, “Germany,” 705.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 707.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 708. Moruzov had been visited by Baron Manfred von Killinger, Hitler’s special envoy to Bucharest, only two days earlier; for details, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), chapter 1.

complete cooperation between the Guard and Carol, and to act upon proposed structural changes to the government party, the National Renaissance Front. The party was reconstituted as the Party of the Nation, into which the Guard was to be integrated. On June 28, Sima joined the government in the improbable position of Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education. On July 4, he was appointed Minister of Cults and Arts in the cabinet of Ion Gigurtu but resigned three days later after his demand for a purely Guardist government had been rejected.⁵⁸ Two other Guardists joined the Gigurtu government: Vasile Noveanu as Minister of Public Wealth, and Augustin Bideanu as Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Finance. The Guard was, therefore, part of government before its advent to power in September but Carol's refusal to grant it a dominant role left Sima simmering with resentment. It was the public outcry over the Vienna Award which gave Sima the chance to convert his rage into action against the King. On September 1, he called for Carol's abdication.

Whereas the Guard had links—albeit somewhat tenuous—to Germany before September 1940, there is no reason to doubt Antonescu's claim, made at his trial in May 1946, that he had no close ties to the Reich before that date.⁵⁹ He came to power in a vacuum, inheriting a situation which was not of his own making. "I went with Germany because I found the country committed to this policy, and no one then, whoever he might have been, could have given it a different direction without the risk of bringing ruin to the entire country."⁶⁰ He went on to state that he maintained this policy for fear of Germany establishing a protectorate over Romania.⁶¹ Indeed, he justified his continuation of Carol's pro-German orientation in a response in March 1941 to three letters from Constantin Brătianu⁶² in which the latter expressed his concern at Romania's enmeshment with Germany:

⁵⁸ Ibid., 709.

⁵⁹ *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente*, vol. II, ed. by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă (Bucharest: Editura Saeculum, 1995), 162.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁶¹ Ibid. See also Rebecca Haynes who reports Horia Sima's contention that Antonescu did not demand Carol's abdication until he discovered Carol's plot to murder him because he feared that if Carol fell from power the Germans would occupy Bucharest by parachute (Haynes, "Germany," 717).

⁶² Dated December 18, 1940, February 14 and 21, 1941.

An alignment with Britain would not only have brought us no effective support, but it would have exposed us to the danger of total collapse. Political alignment with Russia was a moral and factual impossibility. Being unable to count on Britain, and being unable to go alongside the Soviets, Germany remained the only force upon which we could rely both for economic and political support, as well as regards the possibility of creating real military power which we could use at the appropriate moment, in the manner most suited to our interests.⁶³

Antonescu brought to office the mental hardware of a general, one which placed discipline at the head of his priorities. He was not intent on waging war to maintain power, but the threats to Romania were only too obvious, and the options available to him extremely limited. As he himself put it, "in today's circumstances a small country which is under threat, such as ours, does not do what it wishes, but what it can."⁶⁴ King Carol had dismantled the existing political structure, so Antonescu did not have to do it himself. He had to put an end to internal disorder and try to establish what external security he could, with forces which were adequate to deal only with Balkan opponents. In essence, after 1940, any Romanian policy was going to be a military policy.

On September 6, the new King, Michael, issued a decree granting Antonescu unlimited powers as the Leader of the Romanian State (*Conducătorul Statului Român*), thereby relegating himself to the position of a ceremonial figure.⁶⁵ A further decree, signed by Michael

⁶³ Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în cel de-al doilea război mondial* (Bucharest: All, 1999), 80.

⁶⁴ Letter to Constantin Brătianu in Mareşalul Ion Antonescu. *Epistolarul Infernului*, ed. by Mihai Pelin (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1993), 100, 102. The letter was probably written after Yugoslavia was forced to join the Tripartite Pact on March 25, 1941.

⁶⁵ Keith Hitchins makes the point that this new decree differed in one important respect from that signed by Carol on the previous day: the king *appointed* the leader; he did not, as Carol had done, grant him unlimited powers. Four years later, Michael was to appeal to this provision to justify his arrest of Antonescu on August 23, 1944. See Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 455. King Michael did retain powers emanating from the 1923 constitution. When the National Legionary State was declared on September 14, 1940, it was done so by royal decree, as was Antonescu's promotion to Army Corps General.

two days later, defined Antonescu's powers. The *Conducător* had the authority to initiate and promulgate all laws and to modify those already in force; to appoint and dismiss ministers; and to conclude treaties, declare war, and make peace.⁶⁶ The title of *Conducător* came to be identified with Antonescu but it was not, in fact, new. Carol II had introduced it in February 1938 when he suspended the constitution and introduced a royal dictatorship proclaiming himself in the process the leader (*conducător*) of the new state. Antonescu preferred to be addressed as "General" and declared to the press that this formula should be used in all communication with him.⁶⁷

At the time of his appointment as Leader of the Romanian State Antonescu was a man without a party. He himself recognized this. At his trial in May 1946, he recounted how after Carol's abdication on September 5, 1940, he said to Iuliu Maniu: "Mr Maniu, my role will have to end here, I have no party, no political followers, I have no idea of whom to put in which position. Apart from Mihai Antonescu and the military departments, I do not have the possibility of appointing anyone, I have not engaged in politics, although I am accused of doing so, with the visible result that I have no political followers. You wanted the abdication of the King, here, now take the leadership of the state. He answered me: We cannot take it, you are the one who must do it."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, 476.

⁶⁷ *Timpu*, September 8, 1940.

⁶⁸ *Procesul Marei Trădări Naționale* (Bucharest, 1946), 227. See also Antonescu's letter to the National Liberal Party leader Constantin (Dinu) Brătianu of October 29, 1942: "In September 1940, whilst warning me that 'I was doing wrong by bringing the Guardists to power,' you advised me, in the manner of 'helping me out,' to form a government with persons proposed by you and Mr. Maniu. For reasons either good or bad, and on which it is not appropriate for me to dwell, I turned down your advice and I offered you and Mr. Maniu the leadership of the state. Both of you refused on the pretext that, in view of the position of the army, only I could, at that particular moment, take charge of the situation. I assured you of the army's support for a sound government but still you refused. . . . I had no pretention to govern this country. I offered the country to you the moment that I delivered it from the storm which was carrying it to the grave. My role should have ceased on September 7, 1940. I stayed on, however, since you all divested yourself of any responsibility and hid in the face of danger and difficulty." Antonescu, *Epistolarul Infermului*, 333, 348.

Maniu regarded Antonescu as the right person to get the country out of crisis. In Maniu's words, spoken at the Marshal's trial, "It was my feeling that he had the moral authority, the support of the army, and the disposition for state power. . . . For those reasons I said that Marshal Antonescu was, not the only choice, but the most suitable."⁶⁹

Antonescu had planned to form a national government, drawing on support from the two principal parties of democracy, the National Peasants and the National Liberals—who had supported him during the abdication crisis—as well as the Iron Guard. His desire to include the Liberals and National Peasants in a government of national unity should not be confused with any especial sympathy on his part for democratic rule. His own direct experience of government during the 1930s had soured his view of parliamentary rule in Romania. He had nothing but scorn for the political parties which he regarded as corrupt.⁷⁰ He was even more dismissive of the Iron Guard. He stated at his trial in May 1946 that he had only met Sima once, in July 1940, before the abdication crisis, and that he had formed a government with him because he "represented the political base of the country at that time. The whole country had demonstrated its support for the Legionary regime."⁷¹ But he was soon made aware of the Guardists' character during his discussions with Horia Sima and other Guardists over the composition of his cabinet on the night of September 14–15, and came away from them with contempt for their naked lust for power and their total incompetence.

Sima's pretensions also unnerved Maniu. As the Polish ambassador reported:

⁶⁹ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 249.

⁷⁰ This is evident from his reply to a letter from Dinu Brătianu criticizing his conduct of the war: "Well, Mr Brătianu, when someone has been the head of a party which from top to bottom, from the village council to the minister's office, is responsible for administrative chaos, moral turpitude, the deliverance of the country into the hands of Jews and freemasons, venality, compromising the country's future, and for bringing catastrophe to the country's frontiers, he no longer has the right to speak in the name of the Romanian community." Antonescu, *Epistolarul Infernului*, 353.

⁷¹ *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente*, ed. by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă (Bucharest: Editura Saeculum, 1995), vol. II, 162 and vol. I, 188.

The Iron Guard claimed at the outset all portfolios except those of Defence and Finance, and demanded the proclamation of Romania as a Legionary state and of the legionary movement as the only legally-recognized political party. During the negotiations the Legionaries made considerable concessions, insisting only on the proclamation of the single-party character of the state. Maniu was the first to withdraw from the negotiations. The possibility of an understanding with the Liberals . . . failed because the Party's leader, Dinu Brătianu, slated to head the Ministry of National Economy, could not countenance the proposed appointment to the cabinet of Atta Constantinescu, nominated by the Dissident Liberals. . . .⁷²

In these circumstances Antonescu was thrown back on the Iron Guard, sympathy for which had grown considerably following the disasters of the summer, and whose political profile had been given a major boost when Carol included it in the Gigurtu government of 4 July.⁷³ A British assessment of Antonescu's predicament had its finger firmly on the pulse of Romanian feeling at the time:

When called upon to form a government in September 1940, Antonescu made the King's abdication a condition, and having secured that, faced the task of governing the country in the face of a German menace of occupation with the people incensed at the loss of territory, with the new King only 18 years of age, and with the Iron Guard ready and anxious to make trouble.... As regards the German occupation, the only question was whether this should take place with or without consent. Although Antonescu had always been pro-British in sympathy, he decided that it would be better for the country not to be occupied by an

⁷² "Cable from the Polish Embassy in Bucharest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, 16 September 1940," in Vladimir Socor and Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Polish Diplomatic Reports on the Political Crisis in Romania, September 1940," *Southeastern Europe/L'Europe du Sud-Est*, vol.6, part 1 (1979) 106.

⁷³ Rebecca Haynes makes these points in her *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936–40* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 159.

openly hostile force. His decision has been severely criticized, but in view of the impossibility of obtaining help from the Allies, it is hard to see what else he could have done.⁷⁴

Popular support for the Guard was recognized by the Polish ambassador:

Following King Carol's abdication, the Iron Guard—despite the fact that the old political parties published a variety of proclamations—immediately emerged as the most active political force, and was able quickly to reconstitute its organization. On the day of Carol's abdication, Bucharest was covered with portraits of Codreanu. Legionary street demonstrations on 8 September drew over one hundred thousand participants; in Bucharest alone, eight thousand disciplined members took to the streets.⁷⁵

To maintain his grip at the helm of the country, whilst at the same time conceding the leading role of the Guard, Antonescu had the young King proclaim the country a National Legionary State by royal decree on September 14. Antonescu was defined as “the leader of the Legionary State and the head of the Legionary Regime.” He identified his association with the Guard by wearing its green shirt on several ceremonial occasions in the early autumn.⁷⁶ Sima was recommended to Antonescu as Vice-President by Hermann Neubacher, to ensure that both the General and the Guard would accept Sima's leadership of the movement, since the latter had been only thirteenth on Codreanu's list of possible successors upon his death in 1938.⁷⁷ Sima was proclaimed

⁷⁴ PRO, FO 371/37379, document R5111, June 10 1943. Foreign Office Research Department Handbook, ‘Constitution and Politics of Romania,’ 20 April 1943, Foreign and Press Service, Balliol College, Oxford, Royal Institute of International Affairs, directed by Arnold Toynbee, 3–4, quoted from Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 249–50.

⁷⁵ “Cable from the Polish Embassy in Bucharest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, 15 September 1940,” in Socor and Jelinek, “Polish Diplomatic Reports on the Political Crisis in Romania,” 105.

⁷⁶ See photographs of Antonescu in *Pe Marginea Prăpastiei*, 21–23 ianuarie 1941 (Bucharest: Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, 1941), 195–207.

⁷⁷ Haynes, “Germany,” 721.

“the leader of the Legionary Movement,” which was “the only movement recognized in the new state, having as its aim the moral and material enhancement of the Romanian people and the development of its creative powers.”⁷⁸ The direction in which these “creative powers” were to be applied was not specified although the Guard’s behavior was soon to make that clear.

In the cabinet formed on the following day the Iron Guard was given posts which made it the dominant force in the government. Antonescu assumed the presidency of the Council of Ministers and appointed himself Minister of National Defence while Sima was made deputy prime minister. Five other ministries were given to Guard members, among them the Foreign Ministry (Prince Mihai Sturdza) and the Ministry of the Interior (Constantin Petrovicescu). Mihai Antonescu, the lawyer who had acted for the General’s wife when she faced charges of bigamy two years earlier, became Minister of Justice. Ion Antonescu did enjoy respect amongst the Guard’s members for having appeared as a character witness for Codreanu during his trial in May 1938. Touching upon his relations with the Guard during his meeting with Hitler on November 22, 1940, he maintained that he had “no political connection with the Iron Guard, but merely sympathized with it spiritually and supported it in its struggle for justice and international recognition.”⁷⁹

The new government was burdened with internal conflicts which derived from the duality of power between Antonescu and the Guard. Antonescu was reliant on the Guard because he lacked an organized base of public support. The Guard needed Antonescu because he was trusted by the army and the leaders of the democratic parties. But there was a disharmony inherent in the discipline craved by Antonescu, and the lust for power of an intemperate Guard. “The Iron Guard’s domination of the administrative system is of great importance in the competition with the General. The ‘Guardization’ of the administration has been achieved in a single stroke, by the appointment of legionaries as prefects in all the fifty departments of the territorially-reduced

⁷⁸ *Monitorul Oficial* (part 1), no. 214, September 14, 1940, p. 5414.

⁷⁹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D (1937–1945)* (henceforth DGFP), vol. XI (September 1, 1940–January 31, 1941), Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1956, doc.381, pp. 662–70.

country.”⁸⁰ With the extension of the Guard’s power came an intensification in antisemitic propaganda, through the pro-German newspaper *Porunca Vremii*⁸¹ and the Guard’s own daily *Buna Vestire*.

Alarmed by the prospect of graver antisemitic measures in the new National-Legionary state, Wilhelm Filderman, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, expressed his concern to Antonescu who assured him that he was not about to embark on a program of persecution of the Jews. On 18 September, Filderman received a letter from the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in which Antonescu was quoted as saying: “Assure Dr Filderman . . . that if his coreligionists do not openly or secretly sabotage the regime, either politically or economically, the Jewish population will not suffer. General Antonescu keeps his word.”⁸² This prompted Filderman and other leaders of the Jewish community to send a message to Antonescu on 21 September assuring him of their good faith: “Moved by the most sincere sentiments towards the throne and the country, the Jewish population of Romania wishes you a fruitful and peaceful rule and assures you that it will fulfill its duties faithfully and loyally.”⁸³ These sentiments were echoed in a more fulsome telegram sent by the Jewish community in Bucharest. Here the signatories “addressed to the Almighty the fervent prayer that providence should watch over the success of your [Antonescu’s] uplifting of the country.”⁸⁴

On October 5, Antonescu donned the green shirt of the Guard and addressed thousands of legionaries in Bucharest to mark thirty

⁸⁰ “Cable from the Polish Embassy in Bucharest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, 23 September 1940,” in Socor and Jelinek, “Polish Diplomatic Reports on the Political Crisis in Romania, 108.

⁸¹ Mouthpiece of the antisemitic National Christian Party of A.C. Cuza; it was edited and published by Ilie Rădulescu.

⁸² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1940, vol. II: General and Europe*, 772–73, 1 October 1940, Gunther to the Secretary of State. I am grateful to Larry Watts for this reference.

⁸³ Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareșalul și Evreii* (Bucharest: RAO, 1998), 108. The message was signed by Wilhelm Filderman, the Chief Rabbi Dr Alexandru Șafran, and by the secretary of the Jewish Federation Dr. Ion Brucăr.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 108–109. The signatories were Sigmund Birman and Horia Carp.

days since the installation of the National Legionary State. His speech was a rallying call to the Guard but at the same time an appeal for reason: "Legionaries, I have summoned you today from all corners of our amputated country to honor the victory of 6 September. I have assembled you today, green shirts, whole and chaste souls. . . . I have summoned you to perform exemplary constructive deeds and to order you to put aside any thought of revenge or revolt."⁸⁵

It was not long, however, before the Guard's lack of discipline and its penchant for violence sowed the seeds of discord between Antonescu and Sima, and exasperated the Germans. Their priority was economic efficiency, which the Guard disrupted. In the course of this campaign five British oil managers were seized by the Guard, tortured, and forced to sign confessions admitting acts of sabotage.⁸⁶ Further antisemitic legislation was introduced expropriating real estate (October 5), forest land (November 12), and shipping (December 4) owned by Jews. Hermann Neubacher advised Dr Carl Clodius, Deputy Director of the Economic Policy Department at the Foreign Ministry, on November 19 that "the time had come to put a stop to the anarchists and experimenters of the Guard."⁸⁷ Neubacher was not alone in his annoyance. A demand from Sima in a letter to Antonescu in late October for a monopoly of power for the Guard and for the establishment of a new economic order elicited a terse reply from the General stating that he was unwilling to destroy the Romanian economy.⁸⁸

Even more of a threat to Antonescu's authority was the Guard's pledge to avenge its murdered leader Codreanu. As a first step Mihai Moruzov, the head of the Secret Service under King Carol, had been arrested on September 6. Changes were made at the Guard's insistence at the Ministry of the Interior. The Director General of Police appointed by Antonescu was ousted after a fortnight and replaced by Alexandru Ghica, a Guardist. A Criminal Investigation Committee

⁸⁵ ANIC, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, trial of Ion Antonescu, file 40010, vol.8, 72–73.

⁸⁶ One of the managers, Alexander Millar, wrote up his experience; see The National Archives, FO 371/29992 (I thank Maurice Pearton for this reference).

⁸⁷ DGFP, vol. XI, doc. 360, p. 628, 19 November 1940, Bucharest, from the Special Representative for Economic Questions, Neubacher.

⁸⁸ Haynes, "Germany," 723.

was set up by the Guard to discover those responsible for the execution of Guardists under King Carol. The Commission ordered the arrest of thirty-three persons, in addition to those already in custody in Jilava prison south of Bucharest. At the same time, exhumations and reburials of deceased Guardists took place with such frequency and macabre pomp that the new government earned the nickname of “the regime of funeral processions.”⁸⁹ The culmination of these events was the reburial of Codreanu, scheduled for November 30, for which a number of Guardists went to Jilava for his and his thirteen companions’ exhumation.

Two events combined to unleash the Guard’s fury for revenge. The first was the decision of the Committee to transfer two senior officials, Gabriel Marinescu, a former Minister of the Interior and Ion Bengliu, former head of the gendarmerie, held responsible by the Guard for the murder of their colleagues, to a sanatorium. The second was Antonescu’s decision, made at the request of the Jilava prisoners who feared for their safety, to replace the team of Guardists working on the exhumations with a military guard. When the Guardists learned of these decisions they stormed into the cells of Jilava prison on the night of November 26–27 and massacred sixty-four ministers and senior police officers whom they held guilty of murdering Guardists.⁹⁰ On the same night, eleven Jews were murdered by the Guard in Ploiești. The next day a group of Guardists shot Nicolae Iorga dead, Romania’s eminent historian and elder statesman, and Virgil Madgearu, an ex-National Peasant Party Finance Minister. This lawlessness dismayed Antonescu and disquieted Hitler since Romania was of vital strategic importance in the Führer’s plan to attack the Soviet Union.

Relations between Antonescu and the Iron Guard had entered a downward spiral due to the murderous fanaticism of the Guard

⁸⁹ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and Others* (Stanford, CA.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1970), 318.

⁹⁰ The victims included Mihail Moruzov, General Gheorghe Argeșanu, prime minister between September 21 and 28, 1939, General Gabriel Marinescu, Minister of the Interior under Argeșanu, Victor Iamandi, a former Minister of Justice, and General Ion Bengliu, former head of the gendarmerie.

which threatened with anarchy. Murder was the solution favored by the Guard to remove its opponents—as the Jilava massacres had shown—and the means of applying its antisemitism. Scores of complaints were lodged with the courts by Jews in several towns about the violence they suffered at the hands of Guardists. In the period November 15–28, 1940, the Guardist police in Ploiești arrested fifty-eight Jews on the grounds that they were communists. On November 29, Sima, under pressure from Antonescu, dissolved this body in Ploiești because of its lawlessness, and on the very same day the gendarmerie found the bullet-ridden bodies of five of those arrested.⁹¹ In Constanța, in an interval of just one week at the end of December, several Jews accused Guardists of using violence and intimidation in order to force them to hand over their shops to Romanians.⁹²

It was Antonescu's concern about the Guard's activities that led him to request around January 10, 1941 a meeting with Hitler. He added that Sima had already been invited by Baldur von Schirach, Gauleiter of Vienna, and state secretary Ernst Bohle on the instructions of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess when they attended the re-burial of the remains of Corneliu Codreanu on November 30. On January 12, invitations to both reached Bucharest. Initially, Antonescu rejected the idea of travelling with Sima but he changed his mind when he was informed that Hitler placed great value on their combined presence. Yet Sima, too, was unwilling to accompany Antonescu, believing that a joint visit was a stratagem of both Ion and Mihai Antonescu by which he would be left out of the discussions, as had happened to the Guardist Foreign Minister Mihai Sturdza during Antonescu's November visit. Despite the efforts of Fabricius to persuade him to the contrary, Sima announced on January 13 that he would not leave. Thus Antonescu travelled to Obersalzberg to meet the Führer on January 14, 1941, accompanied only by Fabricius.⁹³ Sima's absence meant that he had no chance to rebut the charges made by Antonescu against the

⁹¹ Ion Șerbănescu, *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944*. Vol. III. Part 1, 1940–1942: *Perioada unei mari restriști* Ion Șerbănescu (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), 154–55, doc.105.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 152–53, doc. 104.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

Guard, nor did he give Hitler the chance to make his own personal assessment of the Guard's leader.⁹⁴

Antonescu, by contrast, had made an extremely favorable impression on Hitler during their November meeting, according to Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, despite his two-hour rant against the Vienna Award.⁹⁵ At this January meeting Antonescu was direct in his accusations against the Guard. Their first mistake, he argued, was to open their ranks to undesirable elements such as communists. The second was the attempt to implement their revolutionary program in one fell swoop, in spite of the objections of Antonescu and the German legation. This had created confusion in those ministries under Guardist control, in particular in the Ministry of the Interior and that of the National Economy. As a result of these errors, public opinion, which had overwhelmingly supported the Guard, had now abandoned it. He (Antonescu) had been trying for some time to temper the Guard's zeal since "he wished to retain the Legionnaire regime. He had to reorganize it, however, in order to be able to govern with it."⁹⁶

In reply Hitler told the Romanian leader that he was the only person in Romania who could cope with any situation and that he accorded greater importance to his relations with Antonescu than to relations between the Iron Guard and the Nazi party. If Antonescu thought that breaking off relations between the Nazi party and the Iron Guard would bring benefits, then Germany would not regard this as a sacrifice. He was of the opinion, however, that it would be impossible to govern in Romania against the Iron Guard. Antonescu would ultimately have to become the leader of the Guard and the best thing

⁹⁴ Sima had tried to compromise Antonescu by sending Hitler a letter in which he quoted Antonescu's farewell speech on leaving his post as military attaché in London in the 1920s, a speech in which he stated that Britain must always be victorious because "civilization must always triumph over barbarity." Hitler dismissed Sima's letter as "undignified and stupid"; see Ottmar Traşca and Ana-Maria Stan, *Rebeliune legionară în documente străine*, (Bucharest: Albatros, 2002), 56n135.

⁹⁵ Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, 1923–45; Erlebnisse des Chef-dolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas* (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1949), 511–12. One must bear in mind that Antonescu spoke through the interpreter, which drew out the length of Antonescu's tirade.

⁹⁶ DGFP, vol. IX, doc. 652, p. 1087.

would be for this proposal to be put forward by Antonescu to the Guard itself.⁹⁷

It is clear from the transcript of the meeting that Hitler did not “give Antonescu a free hand to deal with the Guard” but he did feel sufficiently encouraged by the Führer’s support for him to act against it.⁹⁸ The opportunity was provided by the murder of Major Doering, an officer attached to the German military mission, on January 19, outside its headquarters at the Hotel Ambassador in Bucharest.⁹⁹ Antonescu used the murder as the justification for the dismissal of the Guardist Minister of the Interior General Constantin Petrovicescu on the following day, declaring that “the Minister of the Interior, nine

⁹⁷ DGFP, D, XI, doc. 652; see also Andreas Hillgruber, *Les Entretiens Secrets de Hitler, septembre 1939–décembre 1940* (Paris: Fayard, 1969), 432–41.

⁹⁸ The phrase “a free hand to deal with the Iron Guard” was used by the British Minister Sir Reginald Hoare with reference to the meeting in a memorandum to the Foreign Office of January 15, 1941; see PRO FO 317 29990 R384/79/37, quoted from Rebecca Haynes, “Germany and the National Legionary State, 1940–1941,” MA dissertation SSEES, University of London, 13 September 1992, 30. Today’s Iron Guard sympathizers are strongly critical of Hitler’s position at the January 14 meeting. The typical narrative is the following: “[This meeting] will be considered one of the major political errors, both tactically and strategically, of the leader of the Reich in the struggle against the Soviet colossus and of his accomplices, ‘the short-sighted’ Western powers. We go as far as to claim that there and then, the destiny of a Bolshevized Europe was decided for several decades ahead.” Vasile Blănaru-Flamură, *Generalul Antonescu în cămașa verde legionară* (Bucharest: Sepco, 1995), 88.

⁹⁹ Various allegations were made about his murderer Dimitrie Sarandos, a Turkish subject of Greek nationalit. Some claimed that he was a British Secret Service agent, others that he was in the pay of the SSI, the Romanian Secret Service, and had been ordered by Antonescu to carry out the deed to discredit the Guardist Minister of the Interior General Constantin Petrovicescu. A police report into Doering’s murder established that Sarandos had entered the country from Yugoslavia at the Stamora–Moravița frontier crossing on 30 July 1940. Sarandos was having a late meal in the “București” restaurant in the center of the capital when two German officers sat down to dine. Sarandos waited for them to finish and then followed them out, at about midnight. He pulled out a Browning pistol and shot Doering several times in the stomach. Sarandos ran off, casting the gun into the snow, but he was caught by Doering’s chauffeur and brought to the Hotel Ambassador. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [henceforth USHMM], RG 25.004M, reel 57, file 9039, vol.27, ff. 7–9).

hours after the assassination of a brave German officer in the center of the capital, had not taken proper measures . . . nor had he ordered a guard to be placed around the military mission headquarters.”¹⁰⁰ At the same time, he removed the Guardist head of the police, Alexandru Ghika, the chief of the Bucharest police Radu Mironovici, and the chief of the *Siguranța*, the security police, Constantin Maimuca. Ghika and Maimuca barricaded themselves in the *Siguranța* headquarters, together with a group of about fifty Guardists, and opened fire on the troops who had been sent to eject them. The shots marked the beginning of the Iron Guard uprising. Guardist workers occupied the telephone exchange and some newspaper offices where manifestos calling for the creation of a “Legionary Romania” and appealing to the army not to “unleash murder amongst brothers for the pleasure of . . . all the Jews and Jew-lovers,” were printed.¹⁰¹

Both Antonescu and Sima sought German advice. Antonescu asked Fabricius to contact Obersalzberg on January 21 to find out Hitler’s views on the rebellion. Fabricius explained the situation to Ribbentrop. The reply from Hitler, who was standing behind his Foreign Minister, was: “Since blood has flowed General Antonescu should intervene decisively and clean up. He should then reorganize the Guard under his own leadership.”¹⁰² A request from a Guard delegation to Neubacher on the same afternoon for the German army to support them was turned down.¹⁰³ German neutrality in the uprising was confirmed by a note in the diary of General Franz Halder, Chief of the Army General Staff, who wrote that the military mission had been instructed not to intervene but “in case of necessity to support Antonescu with military force (upon a request being made to it).”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, German efforts were directed towards mediation. The report of General Erik Hansen, head of the military mission, recorded that

¹⁰⁰ Simion, *Regimul Politic din România*, 247; see also Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Simion, *Regimul Politic din România*, 251.

¹⁰² Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 120.

¹⁰³ DGFP, vol. XI, doc.709, pp. 1194–98.

¹⁰⁴ Generaloberst Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, vol. II. *Von der Geplanten Landung in England bis zum Beginn des Ostfeldzuges (1.7.1940–21.6.1941)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963), 250.

Fabricius had tried to mediate between Antonescu and Sima during the night of January 21, but that his efforts had failed owing to the exaggerated pretensions of the Guard leader.¹⁰⁵

The revolt was largely confined to Bucharest but the Guardists did not limit themselves to defending their positions in public buildings. During the morning of January 22, Guardists moved against defenceless Jews, looting and burning their homes, and cold-bloodedly murdering 120 of them.¹⁰⁶ That same afternoon Antonescu ordered the army to use tanks against the barricaded Guardists and by the evening they had occupied most of the buildings. Twenty-one soldiers were killed during the operations. Emissaries from the Guardists called upon General Hansen who told them that Antonescu had Hitler's support and that they should lay down their arms. Hermann Neubacher decided to intervene to put an end to the bloodshed. He told Sima that his uprising against Antonescu had no chance of success since the latter enjoyed the full support of the Führer. He advised the Iron Guard leader to withdraw his men from their positions, in which case their safety would be guaranteed. Sima accepted Neubacher's ceasefire terms, to which Antonescu agreed.

Antonescu thanked Neubacher for his mediation. When, however, Antonescu told him that he would hang all the Guard leaders, Neubacher protested vehemently, making it clear that he would not have persuaded Sima to lay down arms had he known the General's intentions. The next day, January 24, the new German minister von Killinger arrived in Bucharest. He carried with him clear instructions "to

¹⁰⁵ Simion, *Regimul Politic din România*, 257.

¹⁰⁶ Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele Evreilor din România, 1940–1944*, vol.1 (Bucharest: Socec, 1946), 319–23. A report of the gendarmerie in Bucharest states that ninety-eight Jews were picked up by legionaries from the streets and their homes and taken down the highway from Bucharest to Giurgiu, south of the capital. Thirty of them were shot at kilometer 13, and sixty-eight at kilometer 14. An official coroner's report puts the number of Jews killed during the rebellion at 120. Șerbănescu, ed., *Evreii din România. Vol. III. Part 1, 1940–1942: Perioada unei mari restriști*, doc. 114, 168–71. The daily *Universul* published the following national tally of victims of the rebellion: 21 army officers and men dead and 53 wounded; civilian casualties were put at 236 dead (of whom 118 were Jews murdered by the legionaries) and 254 wounded in Bucharest, and in the provinces 117 dead and 17 wounded (*ibid.*, note 1).

support General Antonescu in any circumstances.”¹⁰⁷ In order to save the Guard leaders from the noose, members of the German secret service gave refuge in their homes to senior Guardists from where they were smuggled to Germany. Sima, according to the Romanian Secret Service, was hidden in Neubacher’s car and taken to the German legation in Sofia; he was then taken to Germany in an army lorry.¹⁰⁸ This was not the only instance of German assistance for the Guard: General Hansen, head of the German military mission, reported that many of the arms used by the Guardists had also been used at the beginning of September 1940 during the protests against Carol and had been brought from Germany.¹⁰⁹

Thus ended a unique chapter in the history of fascism in Europe. The Guard had been the only radical movement of the right in Europe to come to power without the assistance of Germany or Italy, and the only one to be toppled during Nazi Germany’s domination of continental Europe. During its period of rule, “through its reach for total power, the excesses of the Legionary police, the utter mismanagement of the state administration and the economy by inexperienced youthful militants,” it antagonized most middle-class Romanians and challenged Antonescu’s own political authority.¹¹⁰ Faced with the prospect of a complete breakdown of order in the country should the Guard seize complete control of the state, the officer corps stood firmly behind Antonescu and gave him its full support in his show-down with the Guard.

A ministerial meeting held over a year later, in December 1941, at which the part played by Orthodox priests in the Iron Guard rebellion

¹⁰⁷ Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ Simion, *Regimul Politic din România*, 272. Sima knew that he would be held responsible for the rebellion, even though it appears that Petrovicescu had given the order for the Guardists barricaded at the *Siguranța* headquarters to open fire.

¹⁰⁹ The complexities of the German positions on Antonescu and the Iron Guard during the January rebellion are examined by Rebecca Haynes, “German Historians and the National Legionary State, 1940–41,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 71, no. 4 (October 1993): 676–83.

¹¹⁰ Socor and Jelinek, “Polish Diplomatic Reports on the Political Crisis in Romania, September 1940,” 96.

was discussed, gave Antonescu the opportunity to reflect upon his alliance with the Guard:

Now a new act of clemency [for those implicated in the rebellion] is being applied so that a new chance in life can be given to those who removed life, either by mistake or through ignorance, because they were drawn into a movement, either unconsciously—as many joined the legionary movement—or in the belief that they were supporting an action useful to the Romanian nation. I stood at the head of the latter. I had no alternative but to address myself to the nation through what was on offer from the nation at that juncture, namely through the Legionary movement, because all the other groups had either something wrong with them or had been dissolved. From the universities downwards the nation offered this Legionary movement. Everyone placed their hopes in it. I did not have 100 percent faith in it, I told Mr. Mihai Antonescu so. Later, this movement strayed onto a dangerous path instead of heading in a healthy direction. The Guardists won popularity through the use of terror and dynamism. People thought that if a hundred people got moving, if they fired guns, [then] that movement had vast numbers. The Legionary movement did not have vast numbers, it was merely dynamic; this was how it influenced people. Here we must add the mistakes made by former regimes, which caused people to look elsewhere for solutions.¹¹¹

On 27 January 1941, Antonescu appointed a new cabinet formed almost entirely of officers. In doing so, he was introducing a military dictatorship.¹¹² Antonescu, as a soldier, saw the solution to problems in terms of *raison d'état*. He established a military regime under which senior officers took their orders only from Antonescu and usually dis-

¹¹¹ Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă and Maria Ignat, eds., *Stenogramele Ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu, vol. V. octombrie 1941–ianuarie 1942* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2001), 425.

¹¹² After the removal of the Guardist Foreign Minister Mihail Sturdza in mid-December 1940, Antonescu assumed this portfolio until June 29, 1941 when it was given to Mihai Antonescu who remained Foreign Minister until August 23, 1944.

regarded any decisions taken by other ministers in the government. Thus during the deportation of Jews in the summer of 1941, which was entrusted to the army by Antonescu, army officers ignored permits issued by the Ministry of the Interior allowing individual Jews exemption. This was the case with Jews who were US citizens.¹¹³

Antonescu openly admitted his regime's military character. On November 19, 1941, in a committee meeting, he confessed: "I now want to declare before the world that this state is a militaristic one. That is the direction in which I am pushing it. I want to introduce a patriotic, heroic, military-type education, because economic education and all the others follow on from it."¹¹⁴ A few days later, he addressed the form of government in a cabinet meeting of November 27, 1941: "I am by fate a dictator, because I cannot return to the old constitution, nor to parliament, nor to anything, and I can only solve these problems with the State Council and some experts around me, in order to harmonize all the problems."¹¹⁵

But unlike the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini, Antonescu's dictatorship was not based on a mass political party or ideology. Antonescu's programme was a simple one: order within Romania and security for her frontiers.¹¹⁶ They were to be provided by the police and the army. In his own words to Hitler in June 1941, he "was neither a politician nor a diplomat. He was born a soldier and wanted to die one."¹¹⁷ In a country unfamiliar with discipline, Antonescu tried to impose it. It could be argued that he wanted to corral the Iron Guard but beyond this, his strictures sometimes extended to the ridicu-

¹¹³ Ernest H. Latham Jr., "Signs of Human Feeling and Attitude: The American Legation and American Jews in Romania in 1941," in *US-Romanian Relations in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Ernest H. Latham Jr. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010), 107–126.

¹¹⁴ Ciucă and Ignat, eds., *Stenogramele Ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri*, 191.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹¹⁶ A balanced appraisal of the Antonescu regime is given by Keith Hitchins in his *Rumania 1866–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 469–500.

¹¹⁷ "Minute of the meeting between General Ion Antonescu and the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler on 12 June 1941," in Andreas Hillgruber, *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler. Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über die Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes 1939–1941* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1969), 276–91.

lous—including a ban on walking the streets in shirtsleeves during the summer on pain of internment. While some transgressors were actually punished in this way, the moral and spiritual regeneration sought by Antonescu did not receive the public support he hoped for.¹¹⁸ He was ultimately a lonely figure who found—apart from his wife and mother—only two people he felt he could trust: Veturia, the wife of the poet and former prime minister Octavian Goga, and Mihai Antonescu, whom he kept by his side even when Hitler asked for his dismissal in spring 1943.¹¹⁹

To what degree was Antonescu's Romania a totalitarian state?¹²⁰ As stated above, Antonescu did not seek to carry out a revolution based on a political ideology. His rule certainly intruded into the lives of Jews and Romas, but the vast majority of Romanians were subject only to the demands of a military policy which any ruler of Romania after 1940 would have been forced to apply. Antonescu's tolerance of the democratic opposition, the simple fact that he was prepared to engage in correspondence with its leaders—and also with Wilhelm Filderman, a senior figure in the Jewish community in the early months of the war—at once sets him apart from Hitler. By the draconian yardstick of the Nazi regime, Antonescu's dictatorship was less bar-

¹¹⁸ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1997), 394.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. In a declaration made in preparation for his trial in May 1946, Mihai stated that he had first met Ion Antonescu in 1923 in the house of a relative, Eftimie Antonescu, a former counsellor in the Court of Appeal. Mihai met Ion again on several occasions after that. In 1935, Ion asked him to act for him in a case of bigamy brought against Ion and his wife (ANIC, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne. Trial of Ion Antonescu, file 40010, vol. 3, p. 21.)

¹²⁰ I follow Abbot Gleason in his definition of "totalitarianism": "there . . . is a core of meaning to the term *totalitarian* that was discovered early on and has never been completely lost: the idea of a radically intrusive state run by people who do not merely control their citizens from the outside, preventing them from challenging the elite or doing things that it does not like, but also attempt to reach into the most intimate regions of their lives. These totalitarian elites ceaselessly tried to make their subjects into beings who would be constitutionally incapable of challenging the rule of the state and those who control it." Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10.

barous for most of its subjects, although for tens of thousands of Jews it brought deportation, starvation and death. Freedom of worship was respected for most Christians and Muslims.¹²¹ Although on September 17, 1940, restrictions had been placed on the Jews' freedom to practice their faith, at the repeated request of Wilhelm Filderman, the president of the Federation of the Union of Jewish Communities (FUCE), Antonescu suspended their application. Antonescu is perhaps best described as authoritarian rather than a totalitarian.

There was no fascist party in power during Antonescu's dictatorship but his rule was overtly antisemitic. Antonescu consolidated the antisemitic measures taken by King Carol's governments and by the National Legionary State under his own leadership. It was on his orders that the Foreign Ministry advised the passport office on March 7, 1941 that henceforth passports issued to Romanian citizens of Jewish origin should bear the inscription "Jew or Jewess" in the top left-hand corner of the first page. The criteria for applying this specification were those laid down in the law of August 8, 1940 regarding the legal status of Jews.¹²² A series of measures were introduced to prevent Jewish craftsmen and tradesmen from practising their skills. On March 28, 1941, the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Protection instructed prefectures to cancel the contracts of Jews apprenticed not only to Christian employers, but to Jewish ones as well, and to stop the issue of new ones.¹²³ Much of the property confiscated from Jews was let out to Romanians. Although Mihai Antonescu claimed in March 1944 that to that date "not a single Jewish asset amongst those expropriated from the Jews in 1940 and 1941 has been sold,"¹²⁴ there are reports in the Romanian press of the time of Jewish possessions being sold at auctions.

¹²¹ "Religious associations"—the term for neo-Protestant and other sects—were banned under a decree of 9 September 1940 and some members of neo-Protestant sects were deported in 1941 to Transnistria.

¹²² Șerbănescu, ed., *Evreii din România între anii 1940–1944*, vol. III. Part 1, 189, doc.128.

¹²³ Ibid., 197–99, doc.136.

¹²⁴ In a telegram to Alexandru Cretzianu, the Romanian Minister in Ankara of 14 March. See Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 2000), 144.

Antonescu's first step in establishing order was a decree-law introduced on February 6, 1941 which outlawed all opposition to his regime. The penalty for unauthorized political organization, including marching and singing by political groups, was set at between ten and twenty-five years hard labor. The death penalty would apply to any person found in possession of arms without authorization. A series of other offences carrying the death penalty, such as espionage and treason, were added during the following months.¹²⁵ The National Legionary State was dissolved on February 14 and a massive operation was launched to round up those who had taken part in the uprising. More than 9,000 people had been arrested by the end of the month.¹²⁶ A significant proportion were Orthodox priests.¹²⁷ The Military Provost's office reported that 6,766 legionaries were sentenced to imprisonment during 1941.¹²⁸ Antonescu's measures were given the rubber-stamp of a popular plebiscite on March 2–5, when 99.9% of the voters gave their approval.¹²⁹ Swift retribution was meted out to legionaries who murdered Jews after the rebellion. Two members of a so-called death squad of the Iron Guard were arrested on April 14, 1941 for the murder of a Jewish bookseller by the name of Max London in Bucharest. On the following day, according to a newspaper report, they were sentenced to death and executed.¹³⁰ In May, a number of Guardists found guilty of the murder of Jews in Bucharest were executed, while

¹²⁵ Aurel Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurecției armate din august 1944* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1979), 59–61.

¹²⁶ Simion, *Regimul Politic*, 281.

¹²⁷ At a meeting of the Council for Schools and the Church of 10 December 1941 Ion Sandu, the undersecretary for cultural and religious affairs told Antonescu that 422 priests and 19 cantors had been sent before military tribunals for their part in the rebellion and that verdicts had been pronounced for 262. Ciucă and Ignat, eds., *Stenogramele Ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri*, 421.

¹²⁸ Dorin Dobrințu, "Legionarii și guvernarea Ion Antonescu (1941–1944)," in *Romania: A Crossroads of Europe*, ed. by Kurt W. Treptow (Iași: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2002), 203n18.

¹²⁹ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 469.

¹³⁰ *Universul*, 17 April 1941.

in July Sima and other Guard leaders were sentenced in their absence to forced labor for life.¹³¹

Antonescu's use of the decree epitomized the authoritarian nature of his rule. The instrument used to underpin his system of repression was the internment camp (*lagărul de internare*), to which those judged to be opponents of his regime or a threat to it could be sent, often simply on the recommendation of senior officials in the Ministry of the Interior. Recent research offers a total figure of 10,617 persons who were imprisoned under Antonescu, of whom just over 2,000 were communists or communist sympathizers.¹³² Seventy-two people were executed of a total of 313 persons sentenced to death between 1940 and 1944. Only those communists who were found guilty of acts of espionage or sabotage as Soviet agents were executed, while those who were shown to be members of the Communist Party of Romania had their death sentences commuted.¹³³

Antonescu regarded communism and the Iron Guard as one and the same in presenting the greatest threat to the Romanians and the Romanian state: "Now there are no longer any Guardists; there are

¹³¹ Of the thirty-eight Guardists accused of the Jilava murders in November 1940, twenty were sentenced to death—some in their absence—and seven were executed (Simion, *Regimul Politic*, 285). General Petrovicescu, the former Iron Guard Minister of the Interior, was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. Antonescu approved his release from jail and confinement in obligatory residence in Sibiu on March 2, 1943. Petrovicescu was sent back to prison, to Alba Iulia, after August 23, 1944, and transferred to Sibiu jail at the beginning of December 1944 (ANIC, Ministerul Afacerilor Interne. Trial of Ion Antonescu, file 40010, vol. 29, pp. 59, 74, 96.)

¹³² Dinu Giurescu, *România în al doilea război mondial* (Bucharest: All, 1999), 69. As Giurescu advises, this figure, taken from the archives of the Romanian Communist Party, refers to numbers "arrested and sentenced for anti-fascist activity" and needs to be treated with caution since those who compiled the figure had every interest in inflating the number. On December 16, 1942, there were 1,905 communists interned, of whom 1,211 were in the camp at Târgu-Jiu and 694 in camps and ghettos in Transnistria (Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice*, 73). Florin Constantiniu writes that "10,566 persons were interrogated, arrested and sentenced for political activity, of whom 5,463 were Communists or their associates." Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului roman* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 1997), 395.

¹³³ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului roman*, 395.

the communists in green shirts; they took Codreanu's guard, they don green shirts and say that they are Guardists. In reality, they are communists."¹³⁴ In a meeting of the Council for Cultural and Religious Affairs held on December 10, 1941 he stated: "I consider Communism to be the greatest enemy of the nation, it is a betrayal of the fatherland and I shall punish it with death, and all those who have donned the green shirt and have carried out criminal acts I shall punish in the same way."¹³⁵

Within this statutory framework of dictatorship Antonescu did tolerate what might be termed dissent, rather than opposition. It was expressed in the form of joint letters to Antonescu by Maniu and Brătianu which while critical of his actions regarded him as a necessary evil. Antonescu sent detailed replies, often with the offer to stand aside in favor of the two leaders, but on each occasion the offer was either declined or ignored.

This brings us finally to the question of whether Antonescu was a fascist. An answer to the question requires us, first, to recognize that his period as Romanian leader—strictly speaking King Michael was head of state—can be divided into two. From September 1940 to the end of January 1941, he led a government dominated by the Iron Guard which he then removed and replaced with his own military dictatorship. Second, it hinges upon whether the National Legionary State of which he was head between September 1940 and January 1941, and/or the subsequent three and a half years of his dictatorship can be described as "fascist." In the sense that the period of Iron Guard government and that of subsequent military rule was characterized by military alliance with Nazi Germany and by virulent antisemitism, then both the Guard and Antonescu were fascist. But such a judgment, although accurate, requires qualification. The impact of modernity and the widespread rebellions against its influence on culture and religion provided the dynamics of the Guard's antisemitism. That antisemitism was in part an attempt to heal the profound malaise resulting from a constellation of factors which prevented interwar Romanians from

¹³⁴ Meeting of the Council of Ministers, 27 November 1941, in Ciucă and Ignat, eds., *Stenogramele Ședințelor*, vol V, 236.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 416–17.

enjoying a clear sense of identity, collective national purpose, and place in the modern world.¹³⁶

Suffice it to say that if we define some of the characteristic features of fascism as a crisis of identity stemming from the traditional, often ethnic features of the community; an authoritarian, para-military type of organization; and a backward-looking stance, opposed to industrialization, then the most significant movement in Romania to which this definition could be applied was the Iron Guard. To these we can add in the Guard's case a strong antisemitism and a hatred of Marxism. As Henry Roberts rightly remarks, "fascism is not generally anti-industrial. . . . But in the case of Rumania, with its particular position vis-à-vis industrial society, the fascist response in its most characteristic form involved this negation and an exaltation of the peasant."¹³⁷

Antonescu and the Guard entered a marriage of convenience in September 1940. The divorce, in January 1941, was violent. But the prejudices which had brought them together continued to infest Antonescu's mind, and drove his deeds during the remaining period of Romania's wartime alliance with Hitler's Germany. Seen in that light Romania's military leader appears as a fascist dictator. Yet, as Stanley Payne makes it clear, during the period of the National Legionary State, Antonescu attached, however willingly or unwillingly, to the Iron Guard in the construction of a "national totalitarian state."¹³⁸ After casting aside that yoke at the end of January 1941 Antonescu was free to assume his earlier persona as, in Payne's words, "an ultranationalist right radical rather than a genuine fascist,"¹³⁹ and that judgment has much to support it. Yet such an assessment does not, of course, absolve Antonescu of his responsibility for the war crimes committed under his rule.

¹³⁶ I am grateful to Roger Griffin for offering to me these insights into the Guard's antisemitism.

¹³⁷ Henry Roberts, *Rumania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 225.

¹³⁸ Stanley G. Payne, "Fascism: A Working Definition" in *A History of Fascism: 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 3–19, 394; see also Ernest H. Latham Jr., "Romanian Nationalism during the Reign of King Mihai I" in *Timeless and Transitory. 20th-Century Relations between Romania and the English-Speaking World* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2012), 372.

¹³⁹ Payne, "Fascism," 392; Latham, "Romanian Nationalism," 373.

VLADIMIR PETROVIĆ

*Ethnopolitical Temptations Reach
Southeastern Europe:
The Wartime Policy Papers of Vasa
Čubrilović and Sabin Manuilă*

vampire (*de.* Vampir, *fr.* vampire, *ru.* вампир)

Word of obscure origin, most probably derived from the Serbian expression *vampir*, denoting a demonic being which maintains immortality by feeding on human blood. Stories of vampires flooded Western Europe after the Austrian plunge into Balkans in the early 18th century. In the popular culture, the most famous vampire was Dracula, a character from a novel by Abraham Stocker (1897), fashioned after Romanian medieval prince Vlad Țepeș.

ethnic cleansing (*de.* ethnische Säuberung, *fr.* nettoyage ethnique, *ru.* этническая чистка)

Expression of obscure origin, most probably derived from Serbian (*etničko čišćenje*) or Romanian (*purificare etnică*) late-interwar political vocabulary, denoting state sponsored violence ranging from expulsion to genocide, purported to secure control over a given territory through exclusion of ethnic “others.” Stories of ethnic cleansing flooded the West in the late 20th century with the beginning of the war in former Yugoslavia. Unlike stories about vampires, they were true. And they had a prehistory, which is the subject of this contribution.

The immediate basis for this contribution rests on two documents, both generated during World War II, by esteemed Southeast European academics. One was written by famed Romanian demographer Sabin

Manuilă in October 1941 and was addressed to Romanian *Conducător* Marshal Ion Antonescu, under the title *Population Policy*.¹ The other was authored by the no lesser known Yugoslav historian Vasa Čubrilović in November 1944. It was entitled *The Minority Problem in New Yugoslavia* and it was sent to the newly established communist authorities.² Both documents are memoranda, indeed policy papers, which share stunning similarities even in their wording, but above all in general purpose—the desire to decisively contribute to the ethnic homogenization of Romania and Yugoslavia by the elimination of their respective minorities through mass expulsion. To put it bluntly, these academics acted as advocates of ethnic cleansing with almost fanatical zeal and sense of urgency. “Politically, the time has come, or is very near, for an operation of considerable proportions, which would consist of removing across the border all minorities with centrifugal tendencies from the future territory of Romanian Romania, bringing into the country all Romanians by blood from wherever they might reside, and establishing the new borders of Romanian Romania, eternal Romania, so that political borders and ethnic limits should accurately coincide,” argued Manuilă. In his turn, Čubrilović warned that “we may never again have such an opportunity to render our country ethnically clean. All other problems our country is currently facing, be they of a national, political, social, or economic nature, fade in comparison. If we do not solve the minority problem now, we will never solve it.”³ They both substantiated these claims through extensive demo-

¹ Original in Archivele Nationale Istorice Centrale, Fond Sabin Manuilă, XII/211, 1–10; Published in Romanian in Camil Mureșan, *Transilvania între medieval și modern* (Cluj-Napoca: 1996), 125–31. English translation was published by Viorel Achim, “The Romanian Population Exchange Project Elaborated by Sabin Manuilă in October 1941,” *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 28 (2001): 609–17.

² Original in Arhiv Srbije, Fond Prezidijum Narodne skupštine Narodne Republike Srbije G-16, fas. 1. Published in Serbian by Vladimir Petrović, “Manjinski problem u novoj Jugoslaviji Vase Čubrilovića,” *Hereticus* 1 (2007): 377–91. English translation published by Robert Elsie. ed., *Gathering Clouds: The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo and Macedonia: Early Twentieth-Century Documents* (Peja: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2002), 149–70.

³ Achim, “The Romanian Population Exchange,” 610; Petrović, “Manjinski problem,” 391.

graphic data. They provided details on the means and stages of envisaged mass population transfers.

However, rather than re-narrating the content of their memoranda, this contribution attempts to shed some light on the conditions and circumstances which made it possible for these academics to engage in such blunt legitimization of mass repression. Initially envisaged as an inquiry into the evolution of Serbian ethnopolitical thinking, it was expanded at the encouragement of colleagues who generously helped me to compensate for a linguistic barrier in order to pursue a parallel analysis of the Romanian and Yugoslav cases.⁴ Asymmetrical as it is, such comparison still aspires to show that Manuilă's and Čubrilović's memoranda represent the tip of an iceberg of intellectual radicalism in Southeastern Europe. Triggered by the genocidal currents of World War II these documents require a layered contextualization. They were elements of the regional historical development of nation-building in the Balkans, and they were attempts at (to borrow Amir Weiner's terminology) landscaping the human garden, that supreme intellectual temptation of the age of extremes.

Cleansing as Political Violence and Nation-Building in Southeastern Europe

The point of departure might as well be the startling bluntness of Manuilă's memorandum and the occasional ruthlessness of Čubrilović's wording. To offer a telling example, contrary to an entrenched belief that the expression "ethnic cleansing" owes its existence to the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia, we encounter it in these policy papers as well as in the events surrounding their creation. In its Serbo-Croatian (*etničko čišćenje*) and Romanian form (*purificare etnică*), the term was coined before World War II to further the ethnic homogenization of the Romanian and Yugoslav nation-building projects. Still, this terminological appropriation merits thick recording, for neither Romanians nor Yugoslavs have a monopoly over the term *cleansing*, which stands for one of the most notorious concepts tying power and

⁴ Dennis Deletant, Vladimir Solonari, Viorel Achim, Bogdan Iacob, and Diana Oncioiu.

knowledge literally from Biblical days until today. In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas asserted that “each culture must have its own notions of dirt and defilement which are contrasted with its notion of the positive structure.” Once defined, “dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.”⁵ Elimination of dirt—cleansing—therefore evolves as a ritual of maintaining social order, whose evocation legitimizes even the most extreme and violent actions. The intertwining of the sacral and political function of cleansing defines much of the politics of Antiquity (*καθαίρειν* in Greece, *lustratio* in Latin). As cleanliness becomes a condition of inclusion in a community, dirt becomes an excuse for exclusion. Monotheistic religions also contributed—from the destruction of Cathars (the clean ones) to *épuration* of the Night of St. Bartholomew’s and the Pride’s Purge—to cleansing as a faithful companion of religious conflicts. Differing from war, which consists of violence toward other political communities, cleansing is revealed as an act of extreme, even intimate repression within a given community, implemented to confirm and guarantee a collective identity of the remaining “clean” individuals.

In more recent times, *cleansing*, disentangled from religious overtones but in its secularized form, becomes an extremely important element of organized and systemic repression, typical for the “secular religions” of modernity. To sum it up with a quote from a volume entitled *Politische Säuberung in Europa*: “Political cleansings belong to history as much as a storm is a part of weather.”⁶ Their instrumentalization, both in theory and in practice, was taken to the extreme by the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. In the Soviet Union, cleansing (ru. *чистка*) turned into a central facet of political dynamics within the party, its deadly edge particularly expressed during Stalin’s Great Purge.⁷ At the same time, racial cleansing was the foundation of Hit-

⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge: London, 2002), 2 and 196. Cf. Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy. The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007), 55.

⁶ Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Woller, eds., *Politische Säuberung in Europa* (Munich: DTV, 1991), 7.

⁷ Vladimir Petrović, “Čistka u boljševičkoj teoriji i praksi,” *Hereticus* 1–2 (2011): 167–83.

ler's political program, directed toward rebuilding of the German society cleansed of the Jews (de. *judenrein*). It seems that the decisive academic mobilization around the conceptualization and potential application of ethnic cleansing (de. *ethnische Flurbereinigung*) appeared just around that time, as ethnicities became established units of scholarly analysis, and to extremists their cleansing appeared as viable solution.⁸

In that respect, it does not come as a surprise that the notion of cleansing appears in the process of nation building in Southeastern Europe's newly formed states, whose intellectual and political elites too often regarded speedy homogenization as an effective shortcut to catch up with the West. State building was hence coupled with the aggressive and wide usage of the word cleansing. Consider the Serbian example. The first usages of the term cleansing (*čišćenje*) in Serbian language describe the expulsion of the Turks from the cities captured in the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813). They date from the mid-nineteenth-century writings of the participants of the uprising, such as Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the codifier of the modern Serbian language or Mateja Nenadović, Serbian priest and diplomat.⁹ The term loomed in the poetry of the period, in the famous epic *The Mountain Wreath* by Petar Petrović Njegoš, Montenegrin prince-bishop, but also in state-building memoranda such as *The Design* of Ilija Garašanin.¹⁰ Cleans-

⁸ Cf. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch, eds., *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing 1920–1945* (New York: Berghan Books, 2005). Evolution of the term *ethnic* is discussed in Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (London: Polity, 2010), 12–22.

⁹ In Karadžić's writings the term "cleansed" and "cleansing" (*očišćeni, očišćenje, očistiti*) is used alongside with the term *rašćerani* ("dispersed"). Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Život i običaji naroda serbskog* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2005), 73; 117, 133; Cf. Prota Mateja Nenadović, *Memoari* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1954), 77.

¹⁰ In Petar Petrović Njegoš's classic *Gorski vijenac* the word is mentioned in a verse 95 and is a part of an invented discussion of Montenegrin leaders regarding the expulsion of the Slavic population of Islamic faith. More about the anti-Islamic character of the early emanation of the term in: Cathie Carmichael, "Neither Serbs, nor Turks, Neither Water nor Wine, but Odious Renegades": *Ethnic Cleansing of Slav Muslims and its Role in Serbian and Montenegrin Discourses since 1800*, in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, edited by Steven Béla Várdy and T. Hunt Tooley (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 113–31. On the other hand, in much less precise wording *The Design* states that "this fundament and the basis of the Serbian Empire should be ever more cleansed from the wrecks." Cf. Radoš Ljušić, *Knjiga o Načertaniju* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1993), 132, 153.

ing acquired more official form in military regulations regarding the clearing of terrain after battle, but it has retained its colloquial usage to describe military operations directed to pacify conquered territory. Cleansing of the Ottoman heritage was perceived both as an homage to the glorious past and as an investment in a modernized future.

In the absence of a similar foundational myth, the campaign of cleansing in the regions of the future Romanian state commenced in the linguistic realm as attempts to purify the language through the removal of alleged foreign words.¹¹ With the gradual advent of statehood, menacing utterances were directed not at the Ottomans, but toward minorities, primarily the Jews, seen as obstacles in forging national unity and as *internal foreigners*.¹² They were suspected by Vasile Conta in the Romanian Parliament in 1879 of having “chosen Romania to build a purely Jewish country.” In the “fight against the Jewish element,” Conta interestingly evoked “the principles of modern science.” Even more blunt was writer Ioan Slavici who, around the same time, threatened that “in the last resort, at a given sign, we might have to close our frontiers, cut the Jews down and throw all of them into the Danube so that nothing of their seed remains.” So pervasive was that discourse that even then moderates, such as Aurel Popovici, stated that “once the infusion of ethnically foreign blood exceeds a certain limit, even the biggest and most powerful nation decays.” Similarly, Nicolae Iorga remarked that “three quarters of the inhabitants of Jassy are Jews. Wealth, life and mobility are theirs . . . but, however high the dirty wave of profit-seekers, the soil is ours. And one day the wind will blow away the scum it has brought. And we shall remain.” By the beginning of the new century, however, this discourse of romantic nationalism was joined by the more menacing vocabulary borrowed from medical scientists, such as N. C. Paulescu, professor of physiology at the Medical School of Bucharest: “We Romanians are faced with a capital question: What shall we do with these uninvited guests who suddenly installed themselves in this country, or rather, with these

¹¹ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians. A History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 120–21.

¹² The expression is taken from Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991), 4.

evil parasites who are both thieves and assassins? Can we exterminate them just as, for instance, bedbugs are killed?"¹³

The tendency to ethnicize cleansing was gaining ground as Balkan states prepared for the seemingly inevitable scramble over the territories that would be up for grabs in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's demise. Expected expansions would redefine the frontiers of the region's nation-states. The presumably objective rationale of such ambition was largely provided by ethnographic research, through which the expression 'ethnic' entered Serbian vocabulary. It was institutionalized with the Law on Serbian Academy of Science (1886), which was mandated to conduct, *inter alia*, "ethnographic research." In the forefront of this activity were scholars Stojan Novaković, Tihomir Đorđević, Jovan Erdeljanović, and chiefly Jovan Cvijić.¹⁴ Large projects of collecting information on ethnographic traits in the Balkans had immediate political consequences. Borders were supposed to be detected by ethnographers and secured by politicians and the military. Such collusion between power and knowledge led to a curious reversal of roles: academics embraced the discourse of statesmen and vice-versa. For example, while Serbian prime minister and strongman of the times Nikola Pašić claimed that "each people in the Balkans should stretch until its ethnographic borders," he mused that "Macedonia is neither an ethnographic entity, nor a country in which one people lives, but a mixture of different nationalities. There are Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Turks, Albanians, even considerable parts [of its population] are Jewish." Much blunter about the underpinnings of this ethnographic frenzy was famed Serbian anthropologist, Jovan Cvijić. He once proclaimed: "There was a huge problem: who will control the valley of river Vardar. We particularly argued its great importance for Serbia."¹⁵ *Sapienti sat est.*

¹³ The quotations are taken from Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 14–15, 9, 40, 32, 39.

¹⁴ On development of Serbian ethnology: "Etnološka nauka u Južnih Slovena" in: Tihomir Đorđević, *Naš narodni život* (Belgrade: SKZ, 1923), 1–21.

¹⁵ Speeches of Nikola Pašić from March 31, 1911 and May 15, 1913 in Dubravka Stojanović, ed., *Nikola Pašić u Narodnoj Skupštini* (Belgrade: Službeni list, 1997), vol. III, 453, 508; Jovan Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1966), 111.

This sort of cooperation between knowledge and power morphed into complete collusion in the course of the First and Second Balkan Wars, which were characterized by full-scale national mobilization. Many academics took up uniforms and the ones who remained at their desks were busy building national cases for territorial expansion in expectation of the forthcoming peace conference.¹⁶ Meanwhile, cleansing was turning from a metaphor into a gruesome practice.¹⁷ Understanding that domination over space is secure only by populating the latter with a loyal and nationally conscious population, this practice became an established strategy. According to the Report of the 1914 Carnegie Endowment Commission, such policy aimed at nothing less but “the entire *transformation of the ethnic character of regions*” [my emphasis].¹⁸ Such drastic alteration of local conditions could be introduced only through violence, which raged across the contested territories, leaving behind burnt villages, mass graves and streams of refugees. Once armies took over a new territory, its population was deemed hostile and was exposed to persecution. This wave of repression neither stopped with the end of the hostilities nor changed its course with the outbreak of World War I.

On the contrary, the conflagration brought about the possibility of the dissolution of multiethnic empires such as those of the Habsburgs and Ottomans. In this context, the aspirations of small Balkan states steadily grew. In order to exercise their perceived right of self-determination, in a local interpretation of Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points, old

¹⁶ Ivo Banac argues that the famous Cvijić’s typology of Balkan people was influenced by such concerns. Cf. Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 311–31. Similar tendencies are examined on the example of early ethnographic maps by Peter J. Taylor, ed., *Political Geography. World Economy, Nation-state and Locality* (London: Prentice Hall, 1999), 209–12.

¹⁷ In those combats, characterized both by the high presence of guerilla units and various forms of irregulars, as well as with the wide counter-guerilla operations, Balkan wars were standing out with a scary record of violence directed to the civilians, described in detail in: *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993). More about the scope of the forced migration in this period: Dimitrije Djordjević, “Migrations during the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars and World War One,” in *Migrations in Balkan History* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan studies, 1989), 115–30.

¹⁸ *The Other Balkan War*, 115

feuds were abandoned in favor of securing national self-determination, even at the cost of creating new antagonisms in the region; as was certainly the case with respect to their mutual splitting and crushing of the short-lived republic in the Banat region. Neither was satisfied with the outcome because the division of this historical entity along ethnic lines left substantial minorities on both sides and the provisional demarcation line satisfied neither Serbia nor Romania. Larger escalation of local tensions was avoided simply due to the fact that the issue of Banat was fairly minor in comparison to other prospective territorial acquisitions.

In order to secure post-World War I gains, Romania and the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes resolved the Banat dispute quickly and signed a defensive treaty against Hungary and Bulgaria in 1921.¹⁹ At their other borders, the situation was much more volatile. As it was clear that the ethnographic principle would carry significant weight in charting out borders at the Paris Peace Conference, the urge to preemptively rectify the borders and to cleanse them from “others” actually led to the perpetuation of hostilities well after 1918, as was the case on the southern borders of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.²⁰ Eventually, the ethnographic principle loomed large in charting regional borders, albeit for the benefit of the winners and at the expense of the losing side.

Interwar Ethnopolitics: Human Sciences from Description to Prescription

Patterns of ethnopolitical thinking in interwar Romania and Yugoslavia demonstrate that the winners of the Great War were not necessarily more at ease than the losers. These two countries achieved massive territorial

¹⁹ Cf. *Rumunsko-jugoslovenski ugovor o odbrambenom savezu* (Defence Treaty of Romania and Yugoslavia) in B. Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslovenske države 1918–1941* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga 1975), 157. Cf. Milojko Brusin, *Naša razgraničenja sa susedima 1919–1920* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska 1998); Andrej Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1969); Ivo Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: a study in frontier making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

²⁰ Dmitar Tasić, *Rat posle rata: Vojska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca na Kosovu i Metohiji i u Makedoniji: 1918–1920* (Belgrade: Utopija, 2008).

enlargement. The prewar Kingdom of Serbia transformed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which stretched for 247,542 km² with almost 12 million people (1921). The prewar Romanian Old Kingdom (*Regat*) had 138,000 km², while postwar Greater Romania (*România Mare*) had 295,049 km². Its population increased from 7,771,341 (1915) to 14,669,841 (1919). Both countries became pillars of the Versailles system in Southeastern Europe. However, this enlargement came hand in hand with the increased complexity of the ethnic and religious landscape. In prewar Serbia and Romania, Serbs and Romanian constituted over 95% of the population, whereas in 1930 the situation was very different. Around that time, out of 18 million Romanian citizens, some 71.9% declared as Romanians.²¹ At the same time, as its very name suggests, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes faced even greater complexities. At the general census of 1931, 14 million citizens of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not declare their nationality, only language and religion. Still, the data showed that there were 48.7% of Orthodox, 37.45% Catholics, and 11.12% Muslim believers. At the same time, Serbo-Croatian was a native language for 74% of the population.

Such was the situation which both countries attempted to overcome through centralizing policies with varied success. The attempts to “Yugoslavize” Yugoslavia and “Romanize” Romania were at the center of both national politics and intellectual debates.²² Politically, these issues were coupled with ethno-political approaches to the minorities treaties through which League of Nations meant to secure the rights of ethnicities within newly formed states. For instance, local political elites targeted minorities through selective implementation of agrarian reform.²³ More imaginative attempts to (re)create society were

²¹ “The Jewish population represented the third minority—728,115 (4%) Jews were living after the War on the Romanian territory. Hungarians were the first minority representing almost 8% of the population; Germans were the second with 4.1% of the total population inhabiting Romania.” Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 8–11.

²² Recent comparative study on connection of ethnic nationalism and murderous policies in Romania and Serbia was done by Diana Oncioiu, *The Dangerous Side of Nationalism* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

²³ Cf. Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji. 1918–1941* (Belgrade: INIS, 2006).

to follow in the context of the emergence of new constitutional orders and reconstruction after wartime devastation. A revolution in the social sciences expressed by a curious blend of anthropology, sociology, social medicine, demography, history and the like was providing the new vocabulary to address the issue of ethnic homogeneity and to legitimize the means required for reaching it.

Under the circumstances, the interwar period in Yugoslavia was characterized by intellectual experimentation. At the forefront of such activity one finds again Jovan Cvijić. In his seminal works he domesticated the derivatives of the word *ethnos*. He objectivized the term through a number of concepts. Still, as a proponent of an overarching Yugoslav political identity, Cvijić restrained from employing the notion of ethnic purity. He saw the key of the existence of the new kingdom in the process of mixing of South Slavic ethnic groups,²⁴ claiming that “ethnobiological processes are of immense importance for equalization of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.” At the same time, he aimed to define “the ethnic coefficient by which one calculates the speed and depth of assimilation of different ethnic groups.” His blending of geography and the humanities, which he framed as anthropogeography or ethnopsychology, was of formative relevance for an entire generation of scholars.

After his death in 1927, Cvijić’s successors from different disciplines, ranging from ethnology and anthropology to history, medicine, geography and philosophy, continued experimenting through syncretic endeavors characteristic for this period.²⁵ In their work, *ethnos* became not only an analytical category, but an objective value in need of protection. This disciplinary transformation sometimes materialized into radical proposals. For example, one could read in a 1930 scholarly article by Vasa Čubrilović, professor of history at Belgrade University and conspirator in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand (1914), about “the

²⁴ Jovan Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, 168.

²⁵ The works of Dušan Nedeljković, Gerhard Gezeman, Vladimir Dvorniković, and others. Cf. Rory Yeomans, “Of “Yugoslav Barbarians” and Croatian Gentlemen Scholars: Nationalist Ideology and Racial Anthropology in Interwar Yugoslavia,” in Marius Turda, Paul J. Weindling, ed., *Blood and Homeland* (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2006), 83–122.

struggle of the Balkan people to create racially unmixed, nationally and religiously pure (*čiste*) states.”²⁶ The spacialisation of ethnic problems and the quest for their solution culminated in proposing repressive means. This was particularly the case regarding the issue of non-Slavic minorities in the Yugoslav Kingdom, primarily the Albanians. They were already considered to be a thorn in a Slavic soft underbelly by Nikola Pašić and Jovan Cvijić.²⁷ This notion was resurrected and expanded by Vasa Čubrilović, who in his 1937 policy paper entitled “The Expulsion of Arnauts,” claimed that the Albanian wedge is a crucial “ethnic problem,” which the state did not solve through colonization. Evocating the measures undertaken in other countries, Čubrilović proposed sets of repressive measures, relying on a “brutal force of organized authority.” He legitimized this position in the following way: “We are dealing with a rough, tough, and fertile race, which the late Cvijić characterized as the most expansive in the Balkans.” He warned that “if we do not clarify these things in timely fashion, in twenty to thirty years we will have an enormous movement which will endanger all of our possessions in the South.”²⁸

In Romania, free from such complex trialistic understanding of the nation, many interwar intellectuals developed a more claustrophobic take on ethnic homogenization. The necessity of the latter was announced in 1927 by Octavian Goga, who called for a “purifying storm” needed to achieve the desired “racial purity.” The new generation of intellectuals lambasted the “compromises” of the older generation. They steadily brought into the public space more and more extreme solutions.²⁹ Authors like Emil Cioran in 1936 also saw the struggle against Romanian Jewry as “a matter of purification, no more.” Ethnic regeneration through purification was an impor-

²⁶ Vasa Čubrilović, “Politički uzroci seoba na Balkanu od 1860–1880,” *Glasnik geografskog društva* 16 (1930): 26.

²⁷ Stojanović, *Nikola Pašić*, 506; Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, 190.

²⁸ Vasa Čubrilović, “Iseljavanje Arnauta,” in Pero Simić, *Iskušenja srpske elite* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2006), 74.

²⁹ Complex interplays within this shift of generations are addressed by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Dan Pavel, “The Generation of Angst and Adventure Revisited,” *East European Politics and Societies*, vol.8, no.3 (Fall 1994): 402–38.

tant element of the scientification of the Iron Guard discourse. One of its founding members, Ion Moța, defined its political goal as “total purification.”³⁰ Around the same time, the word “ethnic” entered in Romanian political vocabulary through the works of Nichifor Crainic in his vision of Romanian Orthodox ethnocracy. The latter was best expressed in “The Program of the Ethnocratic State” as “the people’s own nature” with “biological and ethical meaning” found in “soil, blood, soul and belief.” According to historian Leon Volovici, Crainic defined the term *ethnic* in his book *Orthodoxy and Ethnocracy* (1937) along the following lines: “The term ethnic, meaning ‘specifically ethnic’, imprinted in all kinds of manifestations of the nation, like a mark of its original characteristics, was introduced sixteen years ago into great literary circulation by the periodical *Gândirea*: so were the terms autochthonism, traditionalism, orthodoxy, spirituality and many others which have become the common property of the current nationalist language.” By the end of the decade, Crainic connected the creation of Romanian ethnocracy with “the purification of Romanian culture of alien elements.”³¹

Certainly, Crainic’s discourse and the Iron Guards’ activity did not represent the entirety of the intellectual and political life in late interwar Romania. Nevertheless, they were indicative of the pervasiveness of ethnic understandings of the nation. Mircea Eliade expressed this consensus most vocally: “Romanianism means neither fascism nor chauvinism, but simply the desire to have an organic, unitary, ethnic, and equitable state.”³² Within such a context, it is easier to comprehend the contribution of Sabin Manuilă (1894–1964), a physician-turned-demographer. He was the director of the Romanian Central Institute of Statistics between 1937 and 1947 and he was a leading authority on the ethnic policies of his time. During the interwar period, Manuilă’s warnings about the need to adjust demographic policies with the interests of the Romanian nation evolved toward arguing for population transfers with the neighboring countries. By 1935, he advocated for the “purification” of the Romanian western border

³⁰ Quotes are taken from Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology*, 42–43, 116, 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86, 80, 128.

³² *Ibid.*, 89.

along a 100 km-wide territory by colonizing Romanians from abroad.³³ His role was to objectify the “ethnic problem” as means of pressuring political elites to do something about it. He was not alone in his endeavors. Across the region, one could observe scholars going ahead of the political discourse of their times. They employed much more extreme vocabulary and took the unprecedented role of not merely providing description but of formulating prescription. One such move involved the less and less tacit process of the gradual “ethnicization” of cleansing. The latter evolved from the rituals of repressive political cultures into systematic, calculated scholarly projects of homogenizing society for the sake of the state’s stabilization. In such reality, all that was needed was a spark to start the fire.

Into the Fog of War: Ethnic Cleansing and its Scholarly Legitimization

World War II brought just that. In addition to its general brutality, some features typical for Romania and Yugoslavia need to be taken into account. Of particular importance among them was the pattern of humiliating political losses succeeded by the violent reclaiming of lost territory.³⁴ Political conditions changed radically in Romania with the major territorial setbacks of ceding Bessarabia and Bukovina to the Soviets in July 1940, followed by northern Transylvania to Hungary in August 1940. The loss of 40% of its territory and around half of the population effectively brought about the demise of King Carol II’s reign. The new government formed by General Ion Antonescu with the support of the Iron Guard in September 1940 sought legiti-

³³ More biographical details in Viorel Achim, “Romanian–German Collaboration in Ethnopolitics: The Case of Sabin Manuilă,” in *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing 1920–1945*, edited by Ingo Haar, Michael Fahlbusch (Providence: Berghahn Books, 2005), 139–42. Also in Achim, “The Romanian Population Exchange Project,” 593–99.

³⁴ The pattern of violence occurring after national humiliation was explored in the Romanian case by Mihai Chivoeanu, “‘The Harvest of Anger’. Politics of Salvation and Ethnic-cleansing in 1940s Romania: Fascist Thinkers and Authoritarian Doers,” *Romanian Political Science Review* vol. VII, no. 2 (2007): 292–311.

macy in the discourse of regeneration of Romania and in restoring its pride. In effect, Romania sunk into political violence and even though Antonescu clamped down on the Iron Guard by the end of the year, his own speeches, loaded with references to ethnic, national, or racial rebirth increasingly appropriated the rhetoric of cleansing.³⁵ It was far more than rhetoric, as behind closed doors, there was even more bluntness and determination. During a governmental meeting in February 1941, Antonescu underlined the urgent need to “cleanse the atmosphere of the Judaic element” (*purificarea atmosferei de elemente iudaice*). A week after, in the same setting, he doubled down on his earlier utterance: “We will clean the country of foreigners.”³⁶

These ideas have gained full political momentum by June 1941, as Romania prepared to invade the Soviet Union alongside Nazi Germany. It was an opportunity for the local elites to reclaim the lost territory, to solidify its national policy and avenge the recent political humiliation. During the preparations, just five days before the attack, Ion Antonescu’s cousin and Vicepresident of the Council of Ministers Mihai Antonescu addressed the Romanian cabinet in a telling diatribe:

The Romanian Nation is entering a historic moment (and because nobody knows) how many centuries we will have to suffer until we experience similar circumstances again, we have to use this hour to effect purification of the population. . . . This is why Bessarabia and Bukovina will remember the policy of Titus concerning certain populations of ethnic origin—and I assure you that it concerns not only Jews, but it concerns all nationalities. We will come to practice a policy of total and violent removal of foreign elements. Not only from the Romanian point of view, from the point of view of ethnic, racial security of Romanian people, but also from the point of view of high civilization and the unification of European civilizations, we have to come to prac-

³⁵ Cf. Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation. Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-allied Romania* (Washington DC : Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 117–41.

³⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 137–38. The quotes are taken from Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, *Stenogramele sedintelor Consiliului de Ministri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2000), vol. II, 180. I am thankful to Vladimir Solonari and Dennis Deletant for referring me to the original source.

tice a harsh method against the Slavs. Consequently, conquering Bessarabia and Bukovina, as well as the territories beyond the Dniester, which will be incorporated within Romanian sovereignty, we will have to apply a policy of purification and unification of the race via the phenomenon of emigration.³⁷

While the troops were on the move, the pogroms started. At Ion Antonescu's direct order of June 27, Romanian troops started cleansing Iași of its Jewish population, leading to a massive raid in which more than 5,000 people were killed on the spot and at least an additional 8,000 more perished via deportation in death trains in the next couple of days. Cleansing had reached its institutionalization stage.

Elated by the wave of initial victories, Mihai Antonescu condensed his thoughts at a cabinet meeting on July 8, 1941: "I do not know when the Romanians will have the chance for ethnic cleansing (*purificare etnică*) and national revision . . . there is no moment more favourable."³⁸ This may as well be among the first exact wordings of the dreadful, elusive euphemism *ethnic cleansing*; its components had been up in the air for some time already. Mihai Antonescu sent a telegram on July 12, 1941 to Governors of Bessarabia and Bukovina, General Constantin Voiculescu and Colonel Alexandru R. Rioșanu calling upon them "to secure the cleansing of the terrain (*curățirea terenului*) from the communists, the removal of Bolsheviks, of unreliable elements, of Jewish provocateurs, and the removal of Jews residing in villages."³⁹ As the orders were passed down the chain of command, this operation ballooned into carnage of genocidal proportions. According to the report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, by the end of summer 1941, more than half of the 320,000 Jews living in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dorohoi county perished at the hands of the Romanian military and gendarmerie.⁴⁰ The regime

³⁷ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 151–52

³⁸ Ciucă, *Stenogramele sedintelor*, Vol. IV, 57.

³⁹ Solonari, "Patterns of Violence: The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July–August 1941," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* Vol. 8, No. 4 (2007): 749–87.

⁴⁰ Final report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. Bucharest, November 2004, 89. http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/presentations/features/details/2005-03-10/pdf/english/title_foreword.pdf

was not discouraged by the enormous human toll. On October 6, Ion Antonescu was as blunt as his cousin:

My tendency is to implement . . . the purification of the Romanian race and I will overcome whatever hurdle there might be in order to realize this historical aim of the Romanian nation. If we do not take advantage of the current international and European situation to purify the Romanian nation, we will lose the last chance that history gives us. . . . It is not the frontiers that make a *neam* [here with the meaning of “nation,” my emphasis] strong, but the homogeneity and purity of its race. And this is what I pursue before anything else.⁴¹

Around the same time as this speech, Sabin Manuilă was busy finishing his memorandum. The document arrived on Ion Antonescu's desk ten days later, only to confirm his sense of urgency. Inspired, as he emphasized, by a recent meeting with the *Conducător*, Manuilă also reached the conclusion that “the ideal of ethnically homogenous Romania, encompassing all the Romanians, with no exception, has been impossible to realize so far; it has also seemed unlikely ever to be realized in the future. The ideal, our true national ideal, can only be realized now, through the instrumentality of favorable historic circumstances, and under your providential leadership.”⁴²

The plan was short and simple. It included territorial changes which would leave Romania with much of its wartime possessions (of around 290,000 km²), followed by a gradual but compulsory population exchange with neighboring countries. For the minorities which could not be exchanged, such as Jews and Roma, Manuilă simply remarked that their unilateral transfers were not the subject of his paper. The gist of his proposal was to expel more than 3.5 million non-Romanians from the enlarged country: 1,353,276 Hungarians, 991,265 Ukrainians and Russians, 756,930 Jews, 198,629 Poles and Czechs, 179,046 Bulgarians, 60,000 Ukrainians from Pokutia, and 42,427 Serbs. Simultaneously around 1.6 million Romanians were to be set-

⁴¹ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 138

⁴² Achim, *The Romanian Population Exchange Project*, 610.

tled in the vacated territory. The outcome of this plan was supposed to be a population as large as in 1930 (slightly more than 18 million), but 90.9% of whom would be ethnic Romanians. Surely, such a project could not be readily implemented; nevertheless, Antonescu's government, until its very end, remained committed to its cause. The results of coupling such intellectual production with irredentist feelings and political resentment did not come anywhere near to the completion of an ethnopolitical utopia.⁴³

Yugoslavia presents an even more striking case of humiliating dissolution followed by frustration and resentment. In April 1941, it was attacked, defeated, and partitioned by the Axis. What followed was four years best described as *bellum omni contra omnes*. Ruthlessness was the common trait of this period and it reflected in wartime vocabulary as well. Hate speech exploded in the pandemonium of war, with the expression *cleansing* turning into a standard description of wartime operations in which real or invented, armed or unarmed opponents were displaced or eliminated.

Ethnic divides undoubtedly represented important lines of confrontation during World War II. Ethnic cleansing manifested in various forms of repression, including the extermination of the members of an allegedly hostile ethnicity. The perpetrators were not shy about it. Croatian Ustasha leader Mladen Lorković declared that Croatia needs to be "cleansed of all the elements which are unfortunate for the people, which are alien to it."⁴⁴ The phrase is also used in the ethnopolitical memorandum *Greater Serbia* of Serbian Chetnik ideologue Stevan Moljević, from June 1941, in which he states that by the end of the war the desired territory is to be "cleansed from the non-Serb elements."⁴⁵ His ideas seem to have had impact on Chetnik Commander-in-Chief, General Dragoljub Draža Mihailović. His military program of Decem-

⁴³ Not only did Manuilă continue to refine his proposal, but his was followed by the one of Titus Dragoș (December 1942) as well as by one promoted by the specialized commission created by Mihai Antonescu (September 1943). Cf. Vladimir Solonari, "An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no.2 (2007): 268–97

⁴⁴ Cf. Viktor Novak, *Magnum Crimen* (Belgrade: Reprint, 1986), 607–608.

⁴⁵ Mihailo Stanišić, *Projekti Velika Srbije* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 2000), 53.

ber 20, 1941 advocates for a future “Greater Yugoslavia and Greater Serbia, ethnically pure (*etnički čistu*), within the borders of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Srem, Banat, and Bačka.”⁴⁶ Also, during his interrogation, Serbian collaborationist prime minister, General Milan Nedić, claimed he reached an agreement with the representatives of Draža Mihailović that aimed at “cleansing, that is, the destruction of communists in Serbia.”⁴⁷ Cleansing was also a preferred term used by the Wehrmacht to denote operations against the communist-led partisan movement.

On their side, Partisans retaliated by local cleansing campaigns on the territory they controlled. As the war was coming to an end, with partisans achieving strategic advantage, their “cleansing” campaigns expanded. By the end of the war, partisan leader Josip Broz Tito estimated: “It seems to me that in a month to month and a half, the entire territory of Yugoslavia will be cleansed of enemies.”⁴⁸ Emerging from the pandemonium as victors, partisans institutionalized this repressive mechanism to wider proportions. The victory of the communist-led partisan movement opened the door to restructuring the country by significantly altering its territory and population structure. Even though cleansing on an ethnic basis was contrary to its political platform, it was brought on the agenda by the end of the war along with the issue of the treatment of non-Slavic ethnic minorities. Most of these minorities (Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, or Albanians) were associated with the countries who had been engaged in attacking Yugoslavia. Therefore, the interregnum, by the end of the war, was marked with cleansing operations against them. In an order to General Peko Dapčević from 16 October 1944, Josip Broz Tito asked: “Send me urgently one of your best, strongest brigades

⁴⁶ The document at stake is examined at length in the doctoral dissertation of Milutin Živković, *Sandžak 1941–1943* (Belgrade University, Faculty of Philosophy, 2017), 397–400.

⁴⁷ *Izdajnik i ratni zločinac Draža Mihailović pred sudom. Stenografske beleške i dokumenta sa suđenja Dragoljubu-Draži Mihailoviću* (Belgrade: JUN, 1946), 63, 207.

⁴⁸ Josip Broz Tito, *Govori i članci* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1959), vol. I, 275. The extent of the postwar retribution is still a subject of research, but fatalities might exceed 150,000 people in 1944 and 1945. Cf. Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića* (Belgrade: ISI, 2006).

through Bela Crkva to Vršac . . . I need it to cleanse Vršac from German inhabitants.”⁴⁹

The interregnum was also characterized by the institutionalization of the partisan movement. In the course of creating a new system of governance, ties were sought with so-called progressive elements within the bourgeoisie, who had not been tainted by collaboration with the occupiers. One such bridge was found in the unlikely realm of ethnopolitical patchwork, as policies of retribution against some minorities coupled with the issue of agrarian reform and the colonization of land acquired through their expulsion. At the forefront of this venture were disciples of Jovan Cvijić—such as sociologist Sreten Vukosavljević, who became Yugoslav minister of agrarian reform and colonization. He was also the author of a policy paper in which he pushed for the mass expulsion of Vojvodina Hungarians in the immediate postwar period.⁵⁰ Although this plan was not put to practice, most probably because Hungary was at the time in the Soviet orbit, just like Yugoslavia, it remains an indicator of the direction of postwar ethnopolitical thinking.

There was no such shield for Yugoslav Germans. They were objects of an even more comprehensive memorandum entitled *The Minority Problem in New Yugoslavia*. Written by another admirer of Cvijić, Vasa Čubrilović, it was dispatched on November 3, 1944 to the new authorities. It appeared around the time of Josip Broz Tito’s entrance in Belgrade, as troops of Partisan Yugoslav People’s Army were on their way to Vojvodina. Just like Manuilă, Čubrilović felt that the fog of war presented the right moment for decisive ethnopolitical action: “The first thing I would like to mention in this connection is that wars are most suitable for solving such problems. Like storms, they blow through

⁴⁹ Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita* (Rijeka: Mladost, 1981), vol. II, 1109. On the expulsion of half a million ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia, see Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito, The Disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans* (Belgrade: INIS, 2000).

⁵⁰ Original kept in Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore (ASCG), Komisija za agrarnu reformu i kolonizaciju, 97-3-35, *O delimičnom iseljenju Mađara iz Bačke*. Published by Vladimir Petrović, “Etnopolitika smrti: Sreten Vukosavljević i mađarska manjina u Jugoslaviji,” *Hereticus* 3 (2009): 97–107. Also Vladimir Petrović, “A halál etnopolitikája: Sreten Vukosavljević és a jugoszláviai magyar kisebbség. A bácskai magyarok részleges kitelepítéséről,” 2000 (2010. július–augusztus) http://www.ketezer.hu/menu4/2010_07/index.html

countries, uprooting peoples. What takes decades and centuries to accomplish in peaceful times, can be accomplished within a matter of months or years in a war. Let us not delude ourselves. If we wish to have this problem solved, we will only be able to do so during the war.” Pressed with such urgency, Čubrilović outlined not only broad ethnopolitical goals, but also offered a number of concrete measures for their achievement:

In view of their behavior during the war, they [minorities] must be stripped of all minority rights. All members of national minorities who were in any way of service to the occupants should be brought before military tribunals and shown no mercy. Concentration camps should be set up for them, their property confiscated, their families placed likewise in concentrations camps, and, at the first opportunity, they should be expelled to their national states.⁵¹

The result of such actions was expected to be the systemic expulsion of non-Slavic minorities and the colonization of their land by South Slavs. Čubrilović understood that the new state might fall short of his ethnopolitical utopia, therefore he prioritized: “As to priorities for expulsion, I am of the opinion that we should consider the following order: the Germans, the Hungarians, the Albanians, the Italians, and the Romanians. . . . In view of the atrocious crimes committed by the German Reich on Slavic lands with the help of local ethnic Germans, we have every right to demand that these regions be cleansed of this group.” Policy makers who decided on the future of Yugoslav minorities apparently absorbed much of his views, and certainly shared his priorities—in the following six months, the German minority was virtually eliminated from Yugoslavia. This was, however, only a partial fulfillment of Čubrilović’s expectations, voiced at the very end of his policy paper: “It might be that we will never have such an opportunity to render our state ethnically pure.”⁵²



⁵¹ Petrović, *Manjinski problem*, 390–402.

⁵² Ibid.; see also Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito*, 196–294.

How to account for such cruel determination? Certainly, one could interpret it as nothing but blind ethnic hatred wrapped in an emulation of racial supremacy theories, taken from the academic fringes into the lime-light by the horrors of war. However, that would be just too convenient. The uncomfortable truth is that neither Sabin Manuilă (1894–1964) nor Vasa Čubrilović (1897–1990) were mavericks. They stand as representatives of a generation of scholars profoundly believing in ethnic homogeneity as the backbone of modern statehood. Coming of age during the twilight of multiethnic empires, they were prepared to pay an excessively high price for Romania and Yugoslavia to avoid a similar fate. “It is a matter that without a doubt concerns millions of people, the fate of whom is placed in the hands of the State. The highest capacity of organization and an unlimited devotion may lessen the infinite pain caused by uprooting of millions of people, but cannot eliminate it altogether,” wrote Manuilă. Still, he deemed such measures justified, as “the only solution, that could prevent future wars, even the one desired by the entire Romanian nation today, is to carry out a total exchange of populations, which would make future wars pointless.”⁵³ Čubrilović reasoned similarly:

In the endeavor to solve this problem, we must not, however, be guided by a desire to avenge the violence perpetrated against our peoples. Our policy on this issue must be guided simply by reasons of state. . . . There are important state interests forcing us to take advantage of the current war to solve the problem of minorities by expelling them. Our minorities, as we emphasized previously, do not pose a danger to us because of their numbers but rather because of their geopolitical position and the connections which they maintain with the neighboring nations to whom they are related. Due to such ties neighboring nations have been able to use them to wage war against us. At present, the minorities are nothing more than stumbling-blocks in our relations with these neighboring states. The democratic federation of Yugoslavia will only achieve peace and ensure development if ethnically cleansed. When its minority problems are solved, it can remove the causes of friction with neighboring states once and for all.⁵⁴

⁵³ Achim, *The Romanian Population Exchange Project*, 610.

⁵⁴ Petrović, *Manjinski problem*, 390–402.

Convincing themselves that a monoethnic states presents the only lasting solution, and even a key to future peace, stability, and prosperity, Manuilă and Čubrilović were set to convince others. Their appeal is an indicator of a number of worrisome trends in Southeastern Europe. The costly victory of Yugoslavia and Romania in the Great War, followed by growing political instability in the interwar period, mounting social problems and the failure of these enlarged states to resolve them fuelled ethnopolitical temptations, triggering burning eagerness to once and for all catch up with their perceived ideal of modernity. Politicians were looking for shortcuts and intellectuals were quick to provide them. Social sciences appeared to have detected the problem: the ethnicisation of politics seemed to create the possibility for a lasting solution and its wartime extremization promised the means for its achievement.

It would be equally convenient, as well as untrue, to conclude that this trend was put to rest with the end of World War II. Such a global geopolitical disturbance offered a context for local ethnopolitical interventions. The temptation to prescribe murderous remedies for treating mounting social problems was by no means cut short. This line of thinking was pervasive enough to travel with considerable ease between otherwise bitterly opposed ideologies, moving from right to left. The traces of this translation remain inscribed in the biographies of Manuilă and Čubrilović as well. After the war, Manuilă continued working as the director of the Central Statistical Bureau, preparing necessary demographic data for the Paris Peace Conference, whereas Čubrilović was propelled by the Yugoslav communist government to Minister of Agriculture. In this position he was closely engaged in land reform and colonization, therefore overseeing some of the ethnopolitical goals he set. Their coupled biographies finally part ways in 1947. That was the year Manuilă emigrated to the United States, where he continued his scholarly career. Just as Manuilă lost his place in Romanian academia, Čubrilović exited his ministry to resume his professorship at the History Department of Belgrade University. Becoming also a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1959, he lived long enough to witness the new wave of destabilization which Yugoslavia underwent after the death of Tito in Spring 1980. The following year, Albanian protests over Kosovo turned into rioting, which the government violently suppressed, label-

ling it as a counterrevolutionary effort to create an “ethnically pure Kosovo.”⁵⁵ The rhetoric of ethnic cleansing was resurrected.

As this phrase was spreading through late socialist Yugoslav political discourse like wildfire, it remained unclear if Čubrilović was responsible for its reintroduction. He certainly had the ear of influential Yugoslav politicians, particularly in Serbia, where he was revered as Gavrilo Princip’s co-conspirator. However, times had changed, and so did his views.⁵⁶ Venturing into academic politics, he increasingly focused on developing cooperation with neighboring countries, gradually becoming instrumental in the revival of Balkan Studies in the 1960s.⁵⁷ More and more convinced about the instability of inter-ethnic relations among Yugoslavs and the fragility of their state project, he feared further disturbances after Tito’s death and was advocating caution to whoever would listen.⁵⁸ Still, he was gradually losing his audience, even in his own institution, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. A group of its members drafted a document entitled *Memorandum*. Its draft, which emerged in September 1986 under shady circumstances, revealed yet another ethnopolitical policy paper inspired by the perceived calamities inflicted upon the Serbian nation within Yugoslavia. Packed with explosive wording, it included allegations that Serbs are on the verge of being pushed out and even “ethnically cleansed” from some parts of the country, notably Kosovo and Croatia.⁵⁹ Vasa Čubrilović was not among the authors of the draft. Indeed, he was among the rare academicians who publicly dissociated from this text, anticipating its destabilizing effect on Yugoslavia. However, by that time there was no shortage of intellectuals who embraced such views, breathing new life into the old, dangerous euphemism. By the

⁵⁵ Vladimir Petrović, “Ekstremizacija jugoslovenskog političkog diskursa od smrti Josipa Broza Tita do Osme sednice,” in *Slobodan Milošević: Road to Power*, edited by Momčilo Pavlović, Dejan Jović, and Vladimir Petrović (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008), 80–97.

⁵⁶ Zdravko Antonić, *Pogledi Vase Čubrilovića na srpsku istoriju XIX I XX veka* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 1992), 431–85.

⁵⁷ Bogdan Iacob, “Balkans Re-Enchanted: Regionalism in Times of Détente,” in *The Social Sciences in the Other Europe since 1945*, edited by Viktor Karády and Adela Hîncu (Budapest: CEU Past Inc., forthcoming).

⁵⁸ Ivan Stambolić, *Put u bespuće* (Belgrade: Radio B92, 1995), 118–19.

⁵⁹ Draft Memorandum of SAAS, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/674>

time of Vasa Čubriloović's death in June 1990, politicians receptive to such ideas, like Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman, were setting the tone of the Yugoslav crisis, leading the country into war and drawing global attention to the phrase *ethnic cleansing*. Somewhat like a vampire, "ethnic cleansing" was resurrected to continue its ravaging half-life during the bloodstained collapse of Yugoslavia.

MICHAL KOPEČEK

*Czech Communist Intellectuals
and the “National Road to Socialism”:
Zdeněk Nejedlý and Karel Kosík,
1945–1968*

The ambiguous relationship of radical socialism to modern nationalism was encoded already in the teachings of the “founding fathers” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In general, nationalism was a rival and enemy to revolutionary socialism as it postulated the formation of the proletariat as a force transcending national and state identities and operating on a supranational scale. At the same time, however, revolutionary socialists often used and frequently succumbed to the emotional reservoir of national identities for their own strategic purposes or conceptual claims. This chapter—taking as its point of departure the concept of “national road to socialism” in its dual meaning, tactical and theoretical—intends to show the complicated and dynamic development of the central motives (revolution, national emancipation) of twentieth-century “ideological storms” using the Czech and Czechoslovak example. It focuses on two major Czech communist political thinkers and activists Zdeněk Nejedlý and Karel Kosík. The “last Hussite” (J. Křesťan) and probably the most successful post-war ideologue of national Stalinism in East Central Europe, Nejedlý, and the Marxist revisionist rebel and star-philosopher of the Prague Spring, Kosík, represent two completely different existential, generational, and intellectual responses of the Czech radical left to the challenges of their times. Yet both tried, in their own way, to formulate the preconditions, conceptual framework, and pitfalls of the Czech “national road to socialism.”

The National Road to Socialism in Czech Politics and Political Thought¹

The “national/specific road to socialism” is a political term taken from the history of socialist, and particularly communist, political theory and practice. In general, the term refers to the political strategy leading towards socialist society, which acknowledges a particular country’s situation, enabling among other things the possibility of replacing the “standard” revolution by evolutionary—if not parliamentary—development.

As a tactical instrument the “national road to socialism” originated in Czechoslovakia in the particular political conditions of mid-1946 and lasted as a usable political concept (rather than program) until the summer of 1948. At that point it became an important political and ideological tool of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the battle over the “meaning of socialism” but also in the struggle around the redefinition of national identity.² The direct incentive came from Stalin himself in his conversation with British Labor Party leaders, when he proclaimed the possibility of different roads leading to socialism.³ Soon afterwards, “national roads” started to flourish all over the region, but in Czechoslovakia it gained particular importance. After the May 1946 general election, in which the Communist Party gained over 43% of the votes in the Czech part of the country, it seemed that if there was a land where the policy of gradual and parliamentary road to socialism (whatever these terms might have meant for the communist leaders and intellectuals) was possible due to the mass support and generally advantageous situation, it must have been Czechoslovakia.⁴

¹ For a critical reading and their extensive comments on earlier versions of this paper I would like to express my thanks to Johann Arnason, Eva Broková, Miloš Havelka, Jiří Křest'an, Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart, Vítězslav Sommer, and Petr Šámal.

² See esp. Christiane Brenner, “*Zwischen Ost und West:*” *Tschechische politische Diskurse 1945–1948* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009) and Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

³ Cf. *The British Road to Socialism*, The Programme adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party, January 1951, London.

⁴ See Gustav Bareš, *Naše cesta k socialismu* (Prague: ÚV KSČ, 1947).

The concept drew on crucial continuities of the post-1945 Third Republic and its central notions of “national and democratic revolution,” pro-Soviet international orientation accompanied by an emphatic Slavophile cultural turn, and, last but not least, the theory of “people’s democracy” —accepted throughout the legal-political spectrum—as a specific stage in the gradual transition from capitalism to democratic socialism. At the same time, the “national road” also grew from the surge of nationalist feelings shortly after the war accompanied by the expulsion and transfer of the Sudeten-German population from the country.⁵ The “national road to socialism” as a political program and strategic orientation desperately needed an ideological foundation outlining the continuity and congruity between the national and socialist traditions in Czech and Czechoslovak history. The Communist Party found an ideological justification of this kind in the work of a thus far marginal and atypical communist intellectual, historian and musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý.

Albeit in a different terminological frame, the question of a “national road to socialism”—this time in the form of democratic socialism or “socialism with human face”—reappeared in Czech and Czechoslovak political discourse during the reformist 1960s. Not by chance did Czechoslovak reform communist historians of that time devote much of their energy to the first thorough analysis of the politics of the “Czechoslovak road to socialism” around 1946–1948. They viewed the era of de-Stalinization and their present reformist endeavor in many ways as a comeback to that concept and thus to the natural domestic conditions for building democratic socialism.⁶

Nevertheless, the conceptual shift from “national road” towards “national form” during the Prague Spring political debates epitomizes the difference in contexts as well as in essence between the late 1940s and the late 1960s. The reform communism of the 1960s drew a lot from the reinterpretation of national democratic traditions. Yet it was not Nejedlý, but his generation’s younger challengers and crit-

⁵ For a detailed historical analysis, see Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation*, especially, 178–98.

⁶ See Vítězslav Sommer, *Angažované dějepisectví: Stranická historiografie mezi stalinismem a reformním komunismem (1950–1970)* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 2012), esp., 405–29.

ics, youthful and middle-generation reform communist intellectuals, whose historical and theoretical works provided the broader philosophical underpinning of the Prague Spring. One of them was Karel Kosík. His reconsideration of Marxism as political doctrine and philosophical approach as well as his vision of democratic socialism embedded in the particular Czech and Czechoslovak national context represented the most striking counterpoint to Nejedlý's national communist vision.

Both "national roads," in the 1940s as well as in the 1960s, drew from a rich historical intellectual and ideological reservoir. The "national road," namely, as a more general political metaphor appeared in Czech socialist and radical socialist political thought and practice from the late nineteenth until the late twentieth century. In broader cultural terms, the leftist dilemmas with the national question were tied to the so-called dispute over the meaning of Czech history, a crucial and expansive cultural-political debate among leading Czech intellectuals and politicians spanning several decades. Initiated by Tomáš G. Masaryk's fin-de-siècle reformulation of the national-political program in his seminal book from 1895, *Czech Question*, it lasted until the end of the First Republic in 1938. Later, in a different context, the dilemmas about the role of a small nation and its cultural mission in the geopolitically sensitive central European space kept reappearing in Czech public debates throughout the twentieth century.⁷

Even though socialists generally aimed at overcoming state and national borders and highlighted internationalism at the expense of national loyalty, they simultaneously often used national identity bonds for their own purposes. An early and well-known example was the distinction made by Marx and Engels, in 1848, between the progressive "historical nations" with the right to independence and the reactionary nationalist movements of the "history-less peoples."⁸ Lenin's doctrine of global revolutionary struggle further nurtured the ambiguity between socialism and nationalism by subverting Marx's initial argument. Lenin made a distinction between the "exploiting" and the "exploited" nations and included the national liberation fight in colonies into the

⁷ Cf. Miloš Havelka, *Dějiny a smysly? Obsahy, akcenty a posuny "české otázky" 1895–1989* (Prague: NLN, 2001).

⁸ Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism. Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

making of the socialist world revolution. Additionally, Lenin’s theory of “socialist culture” that should have been present—at least in elements—in every national culture provided a clue to the prospective concept of the “socialist nation.” As he stated in one of his articles devoted to the national question, “in every national culture there are elements of democratic and socialist culture, however much underdeveloped, because in every nation there are working and exploited masses, whose living conditions necessary breed democratic and socialist ideology.”⁹

For the radical leftist thinkers in East Central Europe in the new emerging national societies before 1918, and in the “nation-states” that followed, the national question often represented a thorny issue. The solutions—provisional as they were—differed substantially. In the Czech context, similarly to the whole region, we can follow, in the second half of the nineteenth century, splits and schisms within the workers’ movement and socialist camp along three major axes: the national versus the internationalist; the revolutionary versus the evolutionary; and the authoritarian versus the anti-authoritarian.¹⁰

Focusing on the first of these categories, we can see a major institutional and organizational split in Bohemia already at the turn of the century with the creation of the Czech National Socialist Party under the leadership of Václav Klofáč (1868–1942) as a counterpart to Social Democracy. Nationalist, socialist, but moderate in terms of its political tactics, the “national workers” attracted a significant amount of support from the Czech working class, the educated petty bourgeoisie, and the nationally minded intelligentsia.¹¹ During World War I, the national question was again one of the most, if not the most important division

⁹ Vladimir I. Lenin, “Kritické poznámky k národnostní otázce,” in *O proletářském internacionalismu a národnostní otázce* (Prague: Svoboda, 1976), 131. Cf. Neil Harding, *Leninism* (Durham: Duke University Press 1996), 197–218.

¹⁰ Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopeček, *A History of Political Thought in East Central Europe*, sv. 1: *Negotiating Modernity in the “Long Nineteenth Century”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 431–94.

¹¹ Founded in 1897 as a socialist branch of the National Liberal Party, the national socialists became a major challenger to Czechoslovak Social Democracy. Until 1948, the two parties were the most important noncommunist socialist political subjects. After 1948 the party formally remained a part of the so-called National Front system during communist rule. Cf. Josef Krečmer, *Václav Klofáč a jeho národní socialismus* (Prague: Adonai, 2000).

line within Social Democracy. On the one hand there was a reformist or revisionist branch of the party that adopted an increasingly patriotic position during the war. Represented, for instance, by the theorist of cooperative movement František Modráček (1871–1960), this branch started to dominate the party in 1917. On the other hand, the more radical (future communist) branch of the Social Democratic Party was represented by the journalist and outstanding theorist Bohumír Šmeral (1880–1941). It leaned towards the Austro-Marxist tradition and embraced internationalism during and after World War I, which pushed them progressively aside because of their alleged lack of patriotism.¹² Yet just few years later, after 1924, Šmeral and the German foreman Karl Kreibich (1883–1966), two major figures of the founding generation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia established in 1921, came under fierce criticism for not being internationalist enough. They were attacked by both the local left-wing radicals within the Communist Party and the Executive of the Comintern after the latter adopted its strict policy against the “new small imperialist states” established as a result of the Versailles system. The Comintern changed its policy only in mid-1930 with the rise of Popular Front tactics.¹³

Under the circumstances, the adherents of the leftist revolutionary movements in Czechoslovakia and in the whole of East Central Europe showed a considerable discursive as well as strategic variety with respect to the question of national identity and nationalism during the 1920s and the 1930s. These tribulations foreshadowed in many ways the complexity of the radical socialist negotiations on national and nationality question establishing diverse traditions out of which the concepts of “national road” after World War II developed.¹⁴

¹² Bernard Wheaton, *Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia. Bohumír Šmeral, the Czech Road to Socialism and the Origins of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1917–1921)* (New York: East European Monographs, 1986); Zdeněk Kárník, *Socialisté na rozcestí. Habsburk, Masaryk, Šmeral* (Prague: Svoboda, 1968).

¹³ Ben Fowkes, “Communist Dilemmas in Two Multinational States,” in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern. Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–1953*, ed. by Norman LaPort, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley Houndmills (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 206–25.

¹⁴ Alexej Kusák, *Kultura a politika v Československu 1945–1956* (Prague: Torst, 1998), esp., 71–140. Cf. also Jacques Rupnik, *Dějiny komunistické strany Československa. Od počátků do převzetí moci* (Prague: Academia, 2002). In

Zdeněk Nejedlý and Karel Kosík:
Two Communist Intellectuals, Two Generations,
Two Spaces of Experience

Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) belongs to the turn-of-the-century generation of critical intellectuals who took up the challenge of mass politics and revised the political project of their forefathers. His path to the Communist Party was complicated, as he became a member only in 1938 at the age of sixty.¹⁵ Until the early 1920s, he belonged to left liberal or civic radical circles—called the “realists,” coming mostly from academic or journalist professions. They were organized around the founder of the group, professor of sociology, future founder and first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk. Nejedlý not only was one of his great admirers, and remained so until late in his life, but he considered himself as a bearer of Masaryk’s political program calling for a completion of the Czech “national rebirth,” a conception that substantially complicated Nejedlý’s relationship with the interwar radical left.¹⁶

With the leftist political radicalization in the aftermath of World War I, Nejedlý flirted with the anarcho-syndicalist tendencies represented by the journalist, poet, and literary critic Stanislav Kostka

Slovakia the situation obviously differed due to the different context. In the 1920s, the younger generation of leftist intelligentsia was concentrated around the journal *Dav*. For them the national question was of great importance. Apart from the social democratic leadership of Ivan Dérer, all Slovak socialist and communist groups and streams were contesting the official Czechoslovakist discourse as well as the nationalism and autonomism of Andrej Hlinka’s populists. See, e.g., Ján Rozner, “*Dav a problematika jeho doby*,” and Karol Rosenbaum, “*Prínos Davu k riešeniu vzťahov Čechov a Slovákov*,” in *Dav, spomienky a štúdie* (Bratislava: Vyd. SAV, 1965), 7–116; 171–88.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive biography of Nejedlý, see Jiří Křest’án, *Zdeněk Nejedlý: politik a vědec v osamění* (Prague/Litomyšl: Paseka, 2012).

¹⁶ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Z prvních dvou let republiky* (Prague, 1921). Cf. Jiří Křest’án, “Zdeněk Nejedlý a Komunistická strana Československa 1921–1925. Příspěvek k historii vztahů mezi KSČ a levicovou inteligencí,” in *Boľševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, vol. 1., ed. by Zdeněk Kárník and Michal Kopeček (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR – Dokořán, 2003), 15–42.

Neumann (1875–1947) and with left-wing social democrats led by Bohumír Šmeral. Nejedlý's writings of the time were full of admiration for revolution, which he saw as a purifying storm necessary to change the immoral foundations of bourgeois society. But his vision—with all his sympathy for both Russian revolutions of 1917—was very Masarykian at that time. It stressed above all the cultural and moral aspects of the desired change. Initially, Nejedlý was critical of the newly established Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz). He disagreed with what he saw as negativism, dogmatism, internal incoherence, and lack of intraparty democracy. In the early 1920s, he leaned toward the national socialists among whom a number of his friends and colleagues, former Masarykian “realists,” belonged. Yet he did not join any of the socialist political parties. He decided instead to be active in the civil society sphere where he put to good use his experience with associational life and established the Socialist Society in 1921. Four years later, he created the Society for Economic and Cultural Cooperation with the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Nejedlý's nationalism, which combined Masarykian and neo-Romantic motives (e.g., he admired key Czech cultural figures of the nineteenth century such as Bedřich Smetana, Josef Kajetán Tyl, Božena Němcová, Josef Mánes, and Alois Jirásek)¹⁸ clashed with the decisively antinationalist and often anti-Czechoslovak sentiments of the radical leftist groups. This situation determined Nejedlý's distance toward the CPCz until at least the mid-1930s. Nejedlý's idiosyncratic combination of national revivalist myths with Masarykian interest in modern social issues did not find much positive reception in the Party. On the contrary, Nejedlý was heavily criticized, along with other “bourgeois professors,” at the Party's first congress in 1923. One of the chief party ideologues, an adherent of the theory of specificity of Czechoslovak communism, Karl Kreibich did stand up in Nejedlý's defense. Yet the voices in the Party who represented the growingly

¹⁷ Jiří Křesťan, “Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní styk s SSSR a obraz Sovětského svazu v prostředí české levicové inteligence (1925–1929),” in *Boševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismu v Československu* vol. 2, ed. by Zdeněk Kárník and Michal Kopeček (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR – Dokořán, 2004), 84–109.

¹⁸ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Velké osobnosti* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1951).

influential Bolshevik orientation, such as Pavel Reiman (1902–1976) or S. K. Neumann, in line with Comintern internationalism, stressed the reactionary role of all national sentiments including that of the Czech national movement and "Masarykism."¹⁹

It was CPCz's adherence first to Popular Front policy and later—in between the Munich Agreement of September 1938 and the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 and then again after summer 1941—to the nation's defense and national traditions that paved the way to reconciliation between Nejedlý and the CPCz accomplished during his wartime exile in Moscow. This development had been reinforced by the USSR's turn to nationally oriented historicism during the Great Patriotic War. Nejedlý's radio speeches to the nation broadcast in occupied Czechoslovakia as well as his writings full of patriotic pathos, national self-esteem, and clearly recognizable historical references turned him into the crucial communist interpreter of the national-liberation struggle during World War II.²⁰ Neither in Moscow during the war, nor later after the liberation in 1945, did Nejedlý belong to the CPCz's inner power circle. While in Moscow, Stalin craftily manipulated Nejedlý as his potential favorite replacement of President Edvard Beneš if the latter was not cooperative enough. Such ambitions however triggered aloof reactions, if not open irony, from the most of the CPCz leaders in exile in Moscow.²¹ After 1945, Nejedlý was not very proficient in the rules of the Communist Party power game. Aspiring for the highest ideological position, he never really challenged the chief Party Stalinist ideologue Václav Kopecký (1897–1961). Yet at the same time, Nejedlý was one of the few major intellectuals with undisputed academic and public credentials whom the Party eagerly put forward in the cultural and moral "struggle of the progressive forces against fascism." For this reason, he played a crucial

¹⁹ See Stanislav Kostka Neumann, *Krise národa* (Prague: Otto Girgal, 1930); Pavel Reiman and Gustav Breitenfeld, eds., *O Rakousku a české otázce: [Sborník k 50. výročí úmrtí Karla Marxe] Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin* (Prague: K. Borecký, 1933); Jan Šverma, *Česká otázka ve světle marxismu* (Prague: K. Borecký, 1933); cf. Jiří Křesťan, "Zdeněk Nejedlý a česká cesta ke komunismu," *Paginae historiae, Sborník Národního archivu* č. 18 (2010): 302–10.

²⁰ Cf. Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Moskevské stati* (Prague: Nakl. Svoboda, 1946).

²¹ Křesťan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 296–312.

role as cultural icon and intellectual authority legitimizing the communist road to power in Czechoslovakia after 1945.²²

Different historical experiences generating different mental, epistemological, and ideological horizons characterized the life story of Karel Kosík (1926–2003). He belonged to the generation of *Totaleinsatz*, himself a member of the left-wing procommunist youth resistance organization *Předvoj* (Vanguard), for which he was interned in Terezín in 1944. He finished his studies at the Charles University in Prague in 1947 and at the Moscow Lomonosov University in 1949. Because of their enthusiastic support and activism in establishing Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, his generation is also called “the generation of blue shirts” (part of the uniform of the *svazáci*—the Czech “Komsomol”) or the generation of the “communist youth” (*mláďá komunismu*).²³

Kosík was among the leftist radicals studying philosophy at the seminar of the only truly Bolshevik professor at Charles University after 1945, the Prague-born mathematician and philosopher Arnošt (Ernst) Kolman (1892–1979).²⁴ As one of its most active members, Kosík worked at the communist cultural weekly *Tvorba* lead by the head of the agitprop department of the Central Committee of CPCz, Gustav Bareš (1910–1979). This faction represented the Bolshevizing hard-core craving for a radical break with the bourgeois democratic culture and national traditions. It is not surprising that this milieu did

²² Jiří Křesťan, “Intelektuálové bez rozumu? Učenec Zdeněk Nejedlý a fascinující půvab komunismu,” in Kárník and Kopeček, eds., *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus*, vol. V, 15–41.

²³ For a generational approach in analyzing twentieth-century Czech culture, see Miloš Havelka, “Česká kultura a politika před různými horizonty generační zkušenosti,” in *Ideje – dějiny – společnost: studie k historické sociologii věděni* (Brno: CDK, 2010), 332–61.

²⁴ Kolman came from an educated Prague Jewish family starting his public activity as a cultural Zionist. During World War I, he was captured on the eastern front and turned to communism, joined the Bolshevik party and worked as Red Army and Comintern party functionary. Later he became one of the main ideological watchdogs in the field of Soviet science. He was involved in several ideological smear-campaigns and obtained the so-called Soviet Red Professoriate title in the early 1930s. Immediately after World War II he was sent back to the liberated Czechoslovakia as an intellectual envoy of Sovietization and a leading communist propaganda functionary. Cf. Ernst Kolman, *Die verirrte Generation. So hätten wir nicht leben sollen. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1979).

not view the concept of the “national road to socialism” favorably. They did not share the warm emotional attachment to the nineteenth-century national traditions preached by Nejedlý. Yet with Arnošt Kolman being sent back to Moscow by Gottwald himself for his exorbitant Bolshevik radicalism in 1948, and their major protector, the general secretary of the Party Rudolf Slánský (1901–1952) falling victim to a 1952 show-trial, the radicals, albeit numerous in the apparatus, never ventured to challenge Nejedlý’s successful national Stalinist master-narrative in a public attack.²⁵

These radicals began to feel disillusioned with the regime as soon as 1953, which led many of them, with Kosík at the forefront, to confront the Party leadership in 1956 after the twentieth congress of the CPSU for its half-hearted de-Stalinization. In the late 1950s, Kosík worked as a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences. He turned into the spokesperson of the critical Marxist intelligentsia based in editorial boards of several influential journals such as *Literární noviny* or *Kultúrny život*. Kosík’s main cultural and philosophical interests at the time involved the reconsideration of national political traditions in direct contrast to Nejedlý’s interpretation as witnessed by Kosík’s major work *Czech Radical Democracy* (1958). Furthermore, he was one of the front combatants striving to emancipate local Marxist philosophy from the direct supervision by the Antonín Novotný Party leadership. Despite the temporal setback due to the huge, Moscow orchestrated antirevisionist ideological campaign after 1958, revisionist intellectuals such as Kosík, Ivan Sviták (1925–1994), or Robert Kalivoda (1923–1989) “survived”—often in the position of researcher or cultural journalist and editor—well into the 1960s. At that point, they became an important part of the communist reform movement and visible cultural and intellectual actors of the Prague Spring.²⁶ With the publication in 1963 of probably the most important Czech Marxist philosophical work ever, *The Dialectics of the Concrete*, his close collaboration with the Yugoslav *Praxis* group and his wide reception among Western Marxists, Kosík’s fame grew beyond the borders of the

²⁵ Cf. Petr Šámal, ““Česká otázka” ve světle stalinismu: Karel Kosík a koncept levicového radikalismu,” *Soudobé dějiny*, vol. 12 (2005): 45–61.

²⁶ Cf. Michal Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce. Zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě 1953–1960* (Prague: Argo, 2009).

Czechoslovak cultural space, turning him into one of the icons of East European Marxist renaissance in the 1960s.

Nejedlý *Triumfans*: Communists as the Heirs of the Hussites and National Awakening

At the end of World War II, communists in East Central Europe were anything but indifferent towards the legacies of their respective national histories. Already before that the Party ideologues and intellectuals were at pains to place communists into a national historical past depicting them as components of the patriotic whole. After the war, the patriotic discourse turned into an important instrument of the communist propaganda, an indispensable part of the parties' effort to increase their credibility among the population. The universalist revolutionary doctrine and generally the Marxist-Leninist narrative of allegedly lawful historical development culminating in the dissolution of all nations in a global communist society remained at the heart of their political identity. But the radical rhetoric of the dictatorship of proletariat and class struggle were immersed in a more inclusive "national and social revolution" and in calls for "national unity."

In Czechoslovakia, the endeavor to reach coexistence if not harmony between the "progressive national traditions" and the communist-led cultural revolution took political shape only after the Party leadership started to advocate for a "national road to socialism" in the summer of 1946. This was the point when Nejedlý's progressivist historical interpretation stressing the plebeian and egalitarian democratic elements of Czech culture and employing pan-Slavic rhetoric, proved a convenient discursive framework. Nejedlý summarized his grand vision in an extensive lecture for the Socialist Academy in 1946 entitled *Communists, the Heirs of the Great Traditions of the Czech Nation*, which was first published as a Central Committee brochure. Later the booklet was republished several times and became the most important ideological pronouncement of Czech national Stalinism.²⁷

²⁷ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Komunisté—dědici velikých tradic českého národa* (Prague: ÚV KSČ, 1946). Quoted from the edition published in Prague by Československý spisovatel in 1951. In the present article I use the notion of

Here Nejedlý depicted the supposedly progressive line of Czech history and stressed, echoing earlier bourgeois conceptions of Palacký and Masaryk, the legacy of the fifteenth-century Hussite “revolutionary” period as well as the initial phase of the national revival in the first half of the nineteenth century. In his reading, these two periods represented a heyday of progressive forces in Czech history, whose culmination and final victory came in 1945 with the “national democratic revolution.” In the later editions of the booklet, another final station was added: the communist take-over of 1948.

The lecture portrayed communists as direct heirs of the revivalist patriotic struggle and of the “Czech people” (*český lid*)’s long-term struggle for social justice and democracy. Despite the overwhelming power of Czech communists already since mid-1945, the undertone of Nejedlý’s lecture was defensive, directed against the widespread belief that communist ideology was alien to Czech democratic culture. He applied two important conceptual innovations to the interpretation of national history: the Marxist developmental historical perspective along with the class analysis; and, his own idiosyncratic understanding of national traditions as embodied in the historical memory of the “common people.” Claiming an adherence to class-based conceptualization, he applied a binomial view differentiating between two fundamental layers of society. On the one hand, there was a “true nation” composed above all by the “people’s strata” (*lidové vrstvy*) and the progressive part of the intelligentsia, which, according to Nejedlý, always sided with the “revolutionary movement” and which he understood in a quite un-Marxist way as a class-neutral body. On the other hand, there was a “nation of lords” (*panský národ*) that usually betrayed

“national Stalinism” in a pragmatic way relating to a merger of the Stalinist political vision of social transformation and its vocabulary with a distinct nationalist historical identity narrative. In contrast to some authors using the notion of “national Stalinism” as a general term characterizing the nature of communist system in its whole existence in some countries such as Romania or Albania, I use it exclusively for the time of “high Stalinism” in East Central Europe, that is, approx. 1948–1955. Cf. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Bogdan Cristian Iacob, *Stalinism, historians and the nation: history-production under communism in Romania 1955–1966*. PhD Dissertation in History, Budapest: Central European University, 2011.

the nation for its own class interest. These two categories, however, changed over time. A social layer that might have been progressive in one historical period (e.g., the gentry in the high Middle Ages or the Czech bourgeoisie up to the 1860s) could turn conservative and reactionary in later years.

The only permanent and reliable indicator of progress and the bearer of true national tradition was the “people’s strata” whose major representative in the modern age was the working class. The historical memory of the people was ultimately the only competent arbiter of “truly national traditions.” Nejedlý maintained that “it is characteristic that in the good memory of the nation only those [historical actors] remain that went along with the people’s revolutionary movement and remained faithful to it.”²⁸ He had two favorite examples: Jan Hus (c. 1369–1415), the priest and preacher whose teaching and execution by the Konstanz Council in 1415 gave birth to the Hussite movement; and, the famous warlord of Taborite Hussites, the yeoman Jan Žižka of Trocnov (c. 1360–1424). According to Nejedlý, they both held a special place in the historical memory of the Czech nation that clearly overshadowed other favorite historical personalities such as Comenius or Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg.

Nejedlý, albeit educated as a positivist historian, rejected the supposed objectivity of historical science. Drawing on Masaryk’s effort to seek in historical cognition a justification for the national political program, Nejedlý sought the historical-philosophical “meaning” of national history. Yet compared to Masaryk, he understood history and historical tradition in an activist and instrumental sense. This found expression in various quasi-historical *bon mots* that Nejedlý repeated with gusto disregarding that they were often ridiculized. “The communism of Jan Žižka is surely much closer to the Czech national tradition than the fascism of Emperor Sigismund [of Luxembourg, 1368–1437],” he reiterated in *Communists, the Heirs*. Even more well-known became another *bon mot* from the book substantiating Nejedlý’s claim that Hus was above all a social revolutionary and not a religious thinker. “Today Hus would be a leader of a political party and his major platform would not be a church pulpit, but Prague’s [palace]

²⁸ Nejedlý, *Komunisté*, 18.

Lucerna²⁹ or Wenceslas Square. And his party would be very close—we can be sure of that—to us, the communists.”³⁰

Deeply rooted in national Romantic mythology, Nejedlý was convinced about the exceptionally progressive character of Czech traditions. He constantly compared them in his lecture to the German ones. The prevailing reactionary traits of German national history made it, as Nejedlý maintained, particularly difficult for the current German comrades to dig out something progressive out of it. Even more often he referred to the friendly Slavic nation of Poles, who in his view were too much influenced in their national traditions by the aristocracy, with its conduct of honor and detrimental individualism. In contrast, at the core of the Czech national traditions Nejedlý found only such quasi protocommunist characteristic traits as “folksiness” (*lidovost*) and democratism, progressiveness (*pokrokovost*) and revolutionary attitude (*revolučnost*). They all have found their full historical blossom in the “Hussite revolution” especially its most radical branch the “utopic communist Taborite republic” and, once again, in the young, revolutionary democratic Czech bourgeoisie of the 1830s and the 1840s. Its third and final historical triumph, Nejedlý assured, had come to fore in 1945.³¹

However much of Nejedlý’s procommunist national history narrative seemed to be backing up the celebrated “national road to socialism” and, in general, the concept of “people’s democracy” accepted also by the other Czech noncommunist socialist parties, its real triumph came only after the definitive abandonment of the “national road” policy and the Communist Party’s shift to Stalinist and Sovietization policies after the 1948 February coup d’état. Without a doubt, the purge of “bourgeois-nationalist” deviators within communist parties and the emphatic antinationalist rhetoric were ideological pillars of the founding period of communist dictatorships in the region. Especially after the rift with Yugoslavia in the summer 1947 and the inception of the Cold War, any remark about a national road to socialism was seen

²⁹ The Lucerna was traditionally one of the favorite gathering places in Prague for communist political mass agitation.

³⁰ Nejedlý, *Komunisté*, 99–100. Cf. Jiří Křesťan, *Česká otázka v pojetí Zdeňka Nejedlého* (Prague: SÚA, 1996).

³¹ Nejedlý, *Komunisté*, esp., 40–67. Cf. Křesťan, “Zdeněk Nejedlý a česká cesta ke komunismu.”

with utmost suspicion in the Kremlin. Yet, it did not mean the abandonment of the nationalist stereotypes in local communist discourses. It was Stalin himself, even after 1948, who sometimes urged other communist leaders to pepper their political campaigns with national phrases. The anti-Zionist and antic cosmopolitan campaign of 1949 was strongly supplemented with commonly understandable nationalist tropes in the USSR.³² Flirtation with nationalist and, at times, xenophobic rhetoric generally characterized Stalinist leaderships in many countries of East Central Europe. Similarly, the newly established Marxist-Leninist schools of historiography were at pains to combine the Soviet revolutionary doctrine with “progressive” national traditions.³³

Yet in the Czech case—not the Czecho-Slovak, as Slovaks were mostly left out of the overall historical picture acquiring mostly a role of mere object of Czech nationalist political campaigns in the modern era—this attempt proved to be particularly successful. It took the form of Nejedlý’s somewhat naïve but, at the same time, powerful construction of continuity between the “Hussite revolution,” the national awakening, and the socialist revolution. It epitomized the efforts of the Stalinist elites to create a moral-political unity of the new order based on the adoption and internalization of the communist project and morality, yet represented and imagined exclusively as a national community.

Nejedlý, a former left-wing petty bourgeois professor, became probably the most successful national Stalinist ideologist of his time in East Central Europe. This was partly due to a chain of coincidences, such as the fact that Nejedlý never explicitly mentioned in his seminal lecture the concept of the “national road to socialism,” as if guessing that it would not have a long life. Simultaneously, there were deeper structures of his organicist nationalist thought that proved to be compatible with similarly organicist and homogenizing elements of Bol-

³² Žores Medveděv and Roj Medveděv, *Neznámý Stalin* (Prague: Academia, 2003), 269–84.

³³ Cf. Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: PAAN/TRIO, 2005), 192–221. For elaboration on the Czech, East German, Polish, and Slovak Stalinist historiographies on national question, see Maciej Górny, *Przed wszystkim ma być naród. Marksistowskie historiografie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* (Warsaw: Trio, 2007); for Romania, Iacob, *Stalinism, historians*.

shevism. In this way, Nejedlý mediated between the deeply engrained mental world of traditional Czech nationalism (represented at best by the literary oeuvre of Alois Jirásek, a historical novelist and a favorite of Nejedlý) and the Stalinist cultural project.³⁴

For example, Nejedlý extolled, already in the early 1920s, the idea of the need to create a "new human being" by means of coercive utopia. In his 1925 book on Jan Hus he maintained that "people are how the world creates them."³⁵ Very pessimistic about human nature, he preached that people must be forced to do social good and thus become good characters, which went against the logic of Masarykian piecemeal work (*drobná práce*) and social gradualism. Deep in Nejedlý's historical and political imagination there was a yearning for idyllic harmony that was accompanied by strict binary thinking. He came close to the Leninist idea of "two cultures in one nation," the progressive and the reactionary ones that must be separated by cleansing revolutionary forces.³⁶ His interwar writings were full of diatribes against the "lords" nation" parasitizing the people. The liquidation of the former would bring about the desired end of the hopeless pathology of national divisions. Last but not least, Nejedlý was convinced about the role of the charismatic leader and his intuitive insights in bringing historical truths to the people. This motif had deeper roots in his neo-Romantic understanding of artistic creation, which could

³⁴ In an intriguing essay Jacques Rupnik pondered about the "domestic roots" of Czech Stalinism. He did not employ the concept of "national Stalinism" and wrote about two basic communist streams in modern Czech history, one (à la Šmeral) characterized by radical democratic concepts and another (à la Gottwald) typical of the authoritarian Bolshevik doctrine. In his view, the domestic tradition of Czech Stalinism goes back to the late 1920s Bolshevikization of the Party. Yet, his reading is not tied to a discussion of Czech nationalist ideology. See Jacques Rupnik, "Kořeny českého stalinismu," in *Acta contemporanea* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 1998), 319–35. By contrast, the present paper tries to show that there were also other preconditions for the relatively successful performance of Czech Stalinism and these were rooted in fundamental domestic nationalist topoi.

³⁵ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Mistr Jan Hus a jeho význam sociální* (Prague: Vortel a Rejman, 1925), 6, quoted by Křest'an, "Intelektuálové bez rozumu?," 25.

³⁶ Although in 1946 he attributed this concept not to Lenin, but to Stalin and his influential *Marxism and the National Question* from 1913, see Nejedlý, *Komunisté*, 9–10.

simultaneously reveal deep but plain truths through its instinct and genial naivety.³⁷

Some authors consider Nejedlý within the left-wing intellectual milieu, both before and after World War II, as a nationalist and traditionalist thinker or, in a catchy metaphor, as a representative of a “Biedermeier communism.”³⁸ In a broader regional comparison of postwar Stalinist historiographies, Nejedlý’s fundamentally “optimistic Marxist interpretation” strongly echoing previous liberal nationalist historical schools does not seem to be an exception.³⁹

The most eloquent example of Nejedlý’s traditionalist and nationalist tendency was his devotion to the work of Alois Jirásek (1851–1930), a prolific author of historical novels and dramas and one of the most adored but simultaneously criticized in the history of Czech modern literature.⁴⁰ Taking over Palacký’s Romantic interpretation of national history with an emphasis on Hussitism, Jirásek—probably more than any other author—influenced the historical imagery of the Czech population. His traditional realist style of writing, his emphatic patriotic tone celebrating key chapters of Czech statehood and national past along with his plebeian tone did not find much positive echo amongst the fin-de-siècle modernist men of letters in Bohemia. Yet he was a widely popular writer already before World War I. The conflagration along with the concomitant rise of the patriotic struggle for the independent Czech and Czechoslovak statehood further augmented his popularity. During the war he was widely read and appreciated even in the educated strata of the society. In later years, politically allied with the right-wing National Democrats of Karel Kramář, he was officially promoted and published in the Czechoslovak republic. At that time, Nejedlý established himself as one of the most eloquent defenders of Jirásek’s literary oeuvre against critical voices coming mainly from the left and the avant-garde. Nejedlý thus naturally felt fully entitled to become the gatekeeper of Jirásek’s legacy after 1945 and Klement

³⁷ Nejedlý, *Komunisté*. See also Nejedlý, *Tyl, Hálek, Jirásek* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1950). Cf. esp. Křesťan, “Intelektuálové bez rozumu.”

³⁸ Kusák, *Kultura a politika v Československu*, esp., 87–91, 153–55.

³⁹ Górný, *Przede wszystkim ma być naród*, see esp. the conclusion, 403–28.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Alexandr Stich, “Kopací míč Jirásek,” in *Literatura věc veřejná* (Prague: NLN, 2004), 155–66.

Gottwald’s communist leadership gave him full support.⁴¹ A massive state-orchestrated “Operation Jirásek” (*Ĵiráskovská akce*) coordinated by Nejedlý was implemented. It included a complete edition of Jirásek’s writings under the title “Bequest to the Nation” (*Odkaz národu*) in 32 volumes, the inauguration of a museum, or feature films based on his novels.⁴²

Though a source of ironic comments among the radical communist youth, Nejedlý’s adaptation of Jirásek’s traditionalist historical imagination became a biding norm for a broad spectrum of low and medium-level agitators, artists, and scholars. The emerging group of socialist realist novelists formed mostly by middle-aged, established authors (Miloš V. Kratochvíl, Karel J. Beneš, Václav Kaplický, František Kubka) became more or less variants of Jirásek, whose work was considered by Nejedlý not merely historical novels but historiographical accounts, compensating for a yet nonexistent Marxist historical production. This was the main reason why Jirásek’s collected works followed an unusual—for a fiction writer—chronological principle determined by the time period the respective volume focused on starting with the ancient times of old Czech legends all the way to the twentieth century.⁴³ Czech Stalinist historiography took over from them not only the grand narrative of national history and its progressive traditions, but also its plebeian stance, revolutionary rhetoric as well as the inflamed, patriotic pathos.⁴⁴ Jirásek in Nejedlý’s appropriation also became

⁴¹ From Nejedlý’s huge output on Jirásek, see, e.g., Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Alois Ĵirásek: Studie historická* (Prague: Svoboda, 1949), idem: *Čtyři studie o Al. Ĵiráskovi* (Prague: Melantrich, 1949), and idem: *Alois Ĵirásek a společenský význam jeho díla* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1951).

⁴² For detailed analysis of the “Operation” and its broader cultural context in terms of legitimization strategies of the communist rule, see: Petr Šámal, “Znárodněný klasik. Ĵiráskovská akce jako prostředek legitimizace komunistické vlády,” in *Zrození mýtu. Dva životy husitské epochy. K počtě Petra Čorneje*, ed. by Robert Novotný and Petr Šámal (Prague/Litomyšl: Paseka, 2011), 457–72.

⁴³ Ibid., 468–69.

⁴⁴ Cf. Joanna Królak, *Hus na trybunie: Tradycje narodowe w czechskiej powieści historycznej okresu realizmu socrealistycznego* (Warsaw: ISZPUW, 2004); Maciej Górny, *Miedzy Marksem a Palackým. Historiografia w komunistycznej Czechosłowacji* (Warsaw: Trio, 2001), esp., 25–31.

a model for Stalinist historians for criticizing the traditions of domestic bourgeois historiography for instance in a current antic cosmopolitist campaign.⁴⁵

Less overwhelming but not without impact was Nejedlý's attempt to formulate tasks for the "new philosophy" in the peoples' republic. In a lecture at the Philosophical Union in January 1946, reworked and published only in 1950, he came up with harsh criticism of the traditional Czech "scholastic philosophy" (*školská filosofie*) that he considered isolated from real life and mere imitation of philosophical thinking in other countries.⁴⁶ Most of these influences were allegedly of reactionary nature and among them he enumerated Kant, Herbart, Nietzsche, Driesch, and Husserl. Nejedlý's postwar dismissal of German philosophy and idealism was in striking contrast to some of his earlier writings that mirrored his pre-World-War-I inclination to hermeneutics and neo-Kantian methodology in human science.⁴⁷

In order to overcome the putative reactionarism and scholasticism of Czech philosophy, Nejedlý suggested the creation of a new national philosophy based on completely different grounds that strikingly recalled his general concept of national history. The new philosophy had to be recreated on the basis of principles such as folksiness, democratism, and progressivism. These values were epitomized by progressive figures such as Jan Hus, Petr Chelčický, František Palacký, or the greatest nineteenth-century Czech natural scientist Jan Evangelista Purkyně.⁴⁸ Despite criticism from academic philosophers back in 1946, Nejedlý's conceptualization of Czech philosophy proved to be rather successful. Most of the philosophical historiography turned its focus from "professional" philosophers to much broader "philosophical thought" in Czech history. Such disciplinary populism was later

⁴⁵ [Josef Macek, et. al.], *Proti kosmopolitanismu ve výkladu našich národních dějin* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1953). Cf. Górny, *Przede wszystkim ma być naród*, esp., 247–59.

⁴⁶ Zdeněk Nejedlý, "Slovo o české filosofii," *Var* no. 1 (19 March 1950): 1–16.

⁴⁷ See esp. Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Nietzscheova tragédie* (Prague: Bedřich Bělohlávek, 1926), id., *Richard Wagner*, vol. 1, *Richard Wagner romantik, 1813–1848* (Prague: Melantrich, 1916).

⁴⁸ Nejedlý, "Slovo o české filosofii."

rebuked by young radical Marxist philosophers in the second half of the 1950s.

Nejedlý, a relatively weak player in intra-party politics, was surely not the creator let alone the main driving force of the CPCz's national Stalinist cultural policy. But he was one of its symbolic figures, its spokesperson, and doctrinaire. He would have achieved little if his activity had not have been complemented by the involvement of other powerful party decision-makers such as Václav Kopecký, Jiří Hendrych, Ladislav Štoll, who were seconded by influential artists and critics such as Vítězslav Nezval or Jiří Taufer. This group appropriated a position defending the cultural continuity between socialist revolution and the previous national culture. Such synthesis counterbalanced radical Bolshevik or Proletkult projects within the ideological apparatus of the Party, which advocated for a complete break with pre-1945 traditions and aimed at a proletarian cultural revolution.⁴⁹

The history of national literature and the definition of progressive heritage became a cultural battlefield across the entire Sovietized Eastern Europe. The Zhdanovian understanding of socialist realism demanded to purge modern literary history of all possible avant-garde and nonconformist artists, who usually formed the backbone of the radical leftist culture in the interwar period. In Czechoslovakia, the highest authority of Stalinist literary life was Ladislav Štoll (1902–1981), the rector of the Party-political college. He provided a biding interpretation of socialist poetry in his notorious keynote speech at the 1950 plenary session on poetry of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers. He denounced the entire interwar Czechoslovak avant-garde, including many procommunist and left-wing poets and theoreticians such as František Halas, Josef Hora, Jaroslav Seifert, or Karel Teige. In contrast to the supposedly decadent and formalist art, he put forward the example of poet and political journalist Stanislav Kostka Neumann. The latter had formerly been an anarchist, who, unlike other fellow-minded colleagues, fully endorsed Stalinist policies including the show trials of the 1930s, while publicly endorsing the official Soviet artis-

⁴⁹ For the political and power background of cultural politics during the Stalinist era, see Jiří Knapík, *Únor a kultura. Sovětizace české kultury 1948–1950* (Prague: Libri, 2004), and Kusák, *Kultura a politika*.

tic doctrine.⁵⁰ Štoll belonged to the most powerful group of communist cultural politicians headed by the minister of propaganda, Václav Kopecký. In contrast, Nejedlý and to some extent Kopecký himself extolled more “tolerant” and broader definitions of socialist realism.⁵¹

Such a “traditionalist” and relatively moderate approach to cultural policies allowed for the preservation of connections with the bulk of nineteenth-century national revivalist and realist art. Paradoxically, it also enabled occasional references to the interwar avant-garde. For some of its representatives, such as Nezval, this connection alone was a compromise worth of the effort and the dangers that the involvement in the highest echelons of the Party presupposed.⁵² In general, however, the partial-cultural-continuity doctrine stood in contrast to the radical Sovietization policies of the CPCz leadership in other areas of life such as collectivization, political *Gleichschaltung*, sweeping nationalization and centralization of the economy, or ruthless atheization of the society.

Whereas for many the partial-continuity theses was a mere strategic position, for Nejedlý it meant much more. Not all of his interventions were as successful as his engagement with Jirásek’s work and not all historical constructions proved flexible enough to stand the challenges of the revolutionary times. Throughout his life, Nejedlý felt a strong emotional tie and intellectual debt to his teacher Masaryk. He therefore tried hard to preserve at least a part of Masaryk’s legacy in the first postwar decade. In a brochure published in 1950 by the Ministry of Information, Nejedlý distinguished between two phases in Masaryk’s life and thought. During the first, Masaryk, in spite of his

⁵⁰ Besides S. K. Neumann, Štoll extolled also the gifted poet Jiří Wolker (1900–1924) who died young of tuberculosis and who is considered the main Czech representative of modernist proletarian poetry. See Ladislav Štoll, *Tricet let bojů za českou socialistickou poezii* (Prague: Orbis, 1950). Cf. Michal Bauer: *Souvislosti labyrintu: Kodifikace ideologicko-estetické normy v české literatuře 50. let 20. století* (Prague: Akropolis, 2009).

⁵¹ For an analysis of the literary criticism debates about the role of national literary traditions, see Petr Šámal, “Cesta otevřená. Hledání socialistické literatury v kritice padesátých let,” in *Z dějin českého myšlení o literatuře 1948–1958*, vol. 2 (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2002), 583–609.

⁵² Cf. Milan Drápala, “Iluze jako osud. K vývoji politických postojů Vítězslava Nezvala,” *Soudobé dějiny* vol. 3 (1996): 175–218.

idealist humanistic and thus antirevolutionary worldview, played a predominantly positive role as a ruthless critic of the late bourgeois Czech society, of its nationalist phantasies and antisemitic myths. Last but not least, he was an unwavering opponent of Austrian imperialism. The fatal change came in 1917, as Masaryk, according to Nejedlý, failed to understand the world-historical meaning of the Bolshevik revolution and decided to go against it. October 1917 was a "watershed that ends the previous epoch and announces the new one, the age of socialism. A watershed that not only cuts history, but also the lives of individuals ... and it also split the life and work of T. G. Masaryk."⁵³ Nejedlý admitted that after the founding of the republic, Masaryk only served as a quasi-humanist legitimization for the bourgeois class rule and grew increasingly isolated.

However, if the partial-continuity-theses might have worked in selected areas of art and older historical traditions, Masaryk's political legacy was a different matter. Soon there would be no leeway for distinguishing positive and negative phases of his life or his achievements. In an effort to break with the Masaryk myth within the broader strata of the population, Nejedlý was marginalized and the radical left unleashed an all-out attack on the failures of "Masarykism" from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint. One of the actors involved in this campaign was the young Marxist philosopher, Karel Kosík.

Kosík in the Limelight: From Radical Democracy to Democratic Socialism

Though Nejedlý's vision of the communist national heritage served as the basis for mass historical propaganda after February 1948, it did not resonate with young Marxist intellectuals and activists, who worked in the party apparatus, labor unions, educational institutions, or the editorial staff of the daily *Rudé právo* and the cultural weekly of the Party, *Tvorba*. They had much more radical ideas about rebuilding Czech and Czechoslovak culture through revolutionary change inspired by the Soviet model, which had been augmented by Stalin's thesis about

⁵³ Zdeněk Nejedlý, *T. G. Masaryk ve vývoji české společnosti a čs. státu* (Prague: Min. informací a osvěty, 1950), 8.

the “sharpening of class struggle” after the victory of the revolution. They had a very different vision of the future than the older generation represented by Nejedlý and Štoll, and often commented on the work of the “old codger” (*dědek*) Nejedlý with irony and sarcasm. The radicals despised his high esteem of Czech bourgeois culture as much as his intuitive psychological approach to history which neither corresponded to the historical materialist conception of history nor was it dialectical. Efforts to reform Nejedlý’s historical conception took place in internal and informal debates and were introduced through faint suggestions, political journalism, or collections of sources rather than by open confrontation. The main reason was radical leftists’ distrust of the Party leadership in the cultural sphere. Several instances confirmed such reservations. First was the ousting of Arnošt Kolman, the teacher and patron of the young radicals, to the Soviet Union in 1948. In the fall of the same year, after the Party announced the so-called sharp course against reaction, they appeared to be vindicated and on the rise to power. However, another assault against them came, which had direct impact on some of their positions in the Party apparatus and some journals: the scandal of the so-called anti-Party pamphlet in the summer of 1949, which targeted Vítězslav Nezval.⁵⁴ Finally, the leftist radicals lost most of their power-political mainstays with the crack-down against the so-called second center around the Party secretary general Rudolf Slánský in 1951–1952 and the subsequent purge of the “sectarian elements” in cultural politics. This campaign brought an end to the militant communist cultural weekly *Tvorba* and sidelined the most important radical leftist figures in cultural politics such as Gustav Bareš and Pavel Reiman.

In this context, the young radicals could not afford to challenge Nejedlý directly. Nevertheless, the two fundamental historical periods which formed the backbone of Nejedlý’s historical interpretation, fifteenth-century Hussitism and the nineteenth-century “national rebirth,” became targets of radical leftist revisionism. A reconsideration of Hussitism took on a radical mantle in the books of medievalist Josef Macek. He stressed the role of the most radical social groups such as chiliasts and Adamites in the “Hussite revolutionary fight.” Macek did

⁵⁴ Knapík, *Únor a kultura*, 176–244.

not intent to question Nejedlý's fundamental narrative though. On the contrary, he claimed allegiance to both Nejedlý and Jirásek.⁵⁵

Nejedlý's narrative was more directly revised in terms of the political and ideological legacy of nineteenth-century Czech nationalism. The most important figure in this respect was Karel Kosík who begun to publish his first contributions to the history of radical democrats in Bohemian lands immediately after February 1948.⁵⁶ Kosík followed Lenin's theory of two cultures in one nation, progressive and reactionary, yet unlike Nejedlý, he was much more radical in applying the class concept to history. He condemned the esteemed leaders of the Czech liberal national movement of 1848, František Palacký and Karel Havlíček, as the ideologues of bourgeoisie and the creators of the alliance with the nobility and the monarchy. He emphasized the importance of radical democrats such as Josef Václav Frič, Emanuel Arnold, or Karel Sabina, who were much less influential in the Czech case than their counterparts in the Polish or Russian cases. For Kosík, these personalities represented the direct predecessors of the socialist and the workers' movement. The revision of the liberal democratic

⁵⁵ Josef Macek, *Husitské revoluční hnutí* (Prague: Rovnost, 1951). Cf. Macek's political and academic biography: Bohumil Jiroušek, *Josef Macek: mezi historií a politikou* (Prague: VCDV, 2004), esp., 32–49. Similarly, philosopher Milan Machovec provided a radical interpretation of Jan Hus's teachings as an explicit revolutionary program and presage of communist utopianism, but his historical instrumentarium was explicitly drawing from Nejedlý and Jirásek, see Milan Machovec, *Husovo učení a význam v tradici českého národa* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1953). It was only at the beginning of the 1960s that the radical Marxist challenge to Nejedlý's portrayal of the Hussite period by Robert Kalivoda appeared: Robert Kalivoda, *Husitská ideologie* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1961). Yet, for Kalivoda, portraying the Hussite revolution as one of the first early-bourgeois revolutions in Europe meant less engaging with Nejedlý. Kalivoda polemicized above all with the entire preceding bourgeois Hussite historiography, with Engels's conceptualization of German peasant wars as well as with other Czech Marxist historians of Hussitisms, such as Josef Macek and František Graus. Cf. Martin Nodl, "Kontinuita a diskontinuita husitologického bádání 50. a počátků 60. let 20. století," in id., *Dějepisectví mezi vědou a politikou. Úvahy o historiografii 19. a 20. Století* (Brno: CDK, 2007), 105–22.

⁵⁶ Karel Kosík, "Třídní boje v české revoluci 1848," *Tvorba* vol. 17 no. 35 (1948): 693 and vol. 17 no. 36 (1948): 716.

and national Stalinist interpretation of the nineteenth century therefore consisted in repudiating the “utmost reactionary” Austro-Slavic, activist, and liberal democratic political line of Palacký in favor of its “progressive antithesis,” that is, the radical democrats, however unsuccessful they had been in their own time in terms of political mobilization at home or in exile. Another important motive was the internationalist activity of the radical democrats and their close connection to Russian radical democracy, especially to Herzen, which in Kosík’s eyes prefigured the internationalist and pro-Soviet orientation of progressive Czech and Czechoslovak politics in the twentieth century.⁵⁷

In his interpretation alternative to Nejedlý’s traditionalism, Kosík was influenced by Czech Marxist journalism and historical writings from the 1920s and 1930s, when the Communist Party’s cultural organs were under the control of the most radical young leftist generation challenging the ideological roots of Czechoslovak republic and the Masaryk’s national-political project. Symptomatic from this point of view were the writings of Jan Šverma, close ally of Klement Gottwald, who in the essay *Czech Question in Marxist Light* (1933) challenged Masaryk’s conceptions of the ideal of humanism as the basic element of Czech national history. Instead, Šverma portrayed historical development as a reflection of class struggle.⁵⁸ Inspired by him and other Marxist authors, some of whom could not be quoted anymore as they were already anathema for the regime (Záviš Kalandra, Jan Slavík), Kosík rejected Nejedlý’s inversion of Masaryk’s original idea of humanism into his peculiar vision of folksiness, progressiveness, and popular democratism as unifying factors of progressive forces in Czech history. Kosík replaced it with the central motive of revolution and “revolutionary liberation struggle” that formed the backbone of modern progressive Czech historical development. Thus, he abandoned the traditional notion of national “rebirth” or “awak-

⁵⁷ Ibid., see also Karel Kosík, “K některým otázkám národně osvobozenec-kého boje českého lidu v XIX. století,” *Nová Mysl* vol. 7 no. 1, (1954): 37–52, vol. 7 no. 2, (1954): 162–82.; Karel Kosík, ed., *Čeští radikální demokraté: výběr politických statí* (Prague: SNPL, 1953).

⁵⁸ Jan Šverma, *Česká otázka ve světle marxismu* (Prague: K. Borecký, 1933); see also Pavel Reiman and Gustav Bareš, eds., *O Rakousku a české otázce* (Prague: K. Borecký, 1933).

ing” still used by Nejedlý, preferring instead the category of “national-liberation struggle.”⁵⁹

The reconsideration of nineteenth-century political traditions in Bohemia led Kosík to lambast “Masarykian legends” and misconceptions that, in his view, heavily influenced Czech philosophical and historical thinking and endured in the minds of many fellow Marxists. As a radical adherent to the cultural revolution in the minds and hearts of people, Kosík took part in the anti-Masaryk campaign organized by the Party culminating in 1953 and 1954.⁶⁰ Somewhat paradoxically a radical Stalinist “reckoning” with Masaryk’s political and intellectual legacy came relatively late and marked the beginning of the de-Stalinization period in Czechoslovakia. It completed a lengthy process of communist reevaluation of Masaryk from a partly progressive figure to which communists themselves claimed allegiance, to seeing him as a leading representative of bourgeois reaction and international counterrevolution.

Kosík’s major contribution to the “demystification” of Masaryk came out in a thematic issue of the official philosophical journal in summer 1954.⁶¹ He took advantage of the ideological offensive called for at the Party 10th Congress in June the same year. He launched a sweeping criticism of Masarykism as a bourgeois reactionary ideology and of its remnants in Czech intellectual life. His outraged article was not a direct attack against Nejedlý or any other communist politician who had professed a close relationship to Masaryk few years ago. None of them was named. Yet Kosík was clearly aiming at Nejedlý too when he pointed out that after 1945 and even more after 1948 any positive evaluation of Masaryk’s political views, historical role, or philosophi-

⁵⁹ Cf. Petr Šámal, ““Česká otázka” ve světle stalinismu.” For an account stressing not just the discontinuities, but also what connected Kosík with Nejedlý, see Kristina Andělová and Jan Mareš, “Hledání české radikální demokracie: Karel Kosík a filozofie (českých) dějin,” *Dějiny – teorie – kritika*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2014): 183–211.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Jan Pacht, *Pravda o T. G. Masarykovi* (Prague: Orbis, 1953); Václav Král, *O Masarykově a Benešově kontrarevoluční protisovětské politice* (Prague: SNPL, 1953); Václav Král, ed., *Dokumenty o protilidové a protinárodní politice TGM* (Prague: Orbis, 1953); Dragoslav Slejška, “Masarykovská lži-humanita – ideologický nástroj buržoasní reakce,” *Filosofický časopis* vol. 2, no. 3 (1954): 215–29.

⁶¹ Karel Kosík, “O sociálních kořenech a filozofické podstatě masarykismu,” *Filosofický časopis* vol. 2, no. 3 (1954): 196–214.

cal stance were unacceptable forms of “theoretical conciliation” and “renunciation of proletarian partisanship.” Through a substitute target of criticism—Kosík’s generational peer and Nejedlý’s follower, philosopher Milan Machovec—Kosík demolished Nejedlý’s interpretation of Masaryk. The most confused and dangerous of all misleading theories about Masarykism, Kosík pointed out, was the theory about “two phases” in Masaryk’s development and about the “relative progressiveness of Masaryk’s worldview and political stance in the 1880s and the 1890s”—the main ideas that Nejedlý presented in his 1950 brochure. This “Proudhonist view” of Masaryk stressed his relatively progressive role in fighting antisemitism, nationalist mythology, or his support for universal enfranchisement. But it did not recognize, Kosík maintained, the “parasite-opportunist stance of bourgeois politicians, who only temporarily take a ride with the healthy streams of science and society in order to be able to gain capital for their own goals, that is, for the salvation of capitalism.”⁶²

In Kosík’s rendition, the analysis of the “social roots and philosophical essence” of Masarykism pointed to its “reactionary character” from the very beginning, in the 1880s. At that time the adaptability of Masaryk’s thought, his illusionary democratism, his seeming interest in social questions, all this made Masarykism a convenient bourgeois instrument of the enslavement of the masses. Confined to a rather smaller circle of bourgeois intelligentsia before the Great War, it became, after 1918, the republic’s bourgeois mainstream, the “ideology and politics of Czech bourgeois nationalist supremacy over Slovaks and other nations, the ideology and politics of vassal dependency on Western powers, the ideology and politics of exploitation of the working people disguised by phrases about love and humanity.” This ideology, Kosík maintained, was destroyed in the 1938 Munich crisis but it rose up again after 1945 in defense of the “counter-revolutionary ideology of democratic socialism” represented by right-wing social democrats, proving once again its reactionary nature.⁶³

By the mid-1950s, times were changing abruptly and the unfolding de-Stalinization brought about the life-changing wave of disillusion for the “generation of blue shirts” that Kosík belonged to. This

⁶² Ibid., 200.

⁶³ Ibid., 205.

resulted in a shift in political identity among the younger radical Marxist intellectuals, who started to turn their radical critique from the bourgeois past and its culture to the current state socialist establishment. At that time, the Czechoslovak communist cultural policy landscape, always divided into several conflicting factions, started to reorganize itself into two, loosely connected and heterogeneous groups. On the one hand, there were the Party ideologues who were originally of radical (Jiří Hájek, Jiří Hendrych) or “moderate” (Ladislav Štoll, Jiří Taufer) provenance. They tried to slow down any independent cultural movements that were capitalizing on the nascent de-Stalinization ethos. On the other hand, there were the heirs of the former interwar avant-garde, led by the charismatic poet Vítězslav Nezval, along with writers gathering around the newly founded *Literární noviny*. They were joined by the emerging literary generation, gathered a bit later around the journal *Květen* (Miroslav Červenka, Miroslav Holub, M. Florian, Milan Kundera, Jiří Šotola). The latter tried to initiate a partial renewal of the legacy of the interwar avant-garde and to trigger a loosening of restrictions, the improvement of the independence of culture from direct political oversight, and a reevaluation of socialist realism. In time, this critical current amplified its criticisms of Party policies and the most flagrant blunders of Stalinism in culture. It found expression in audacious speeches of several Czech and Slovak writers, such as František Hrubín, Dominik Tatarka, and Jaroslav Seifert, at the Second Congress of the Czechoslovak writers in April 1956.⁶⁴

Kosík sympathized with the latter group and soon became one of its public icons. He took part in one of the most symptomatic public debates in 1956 regarding the relationship between ideology and science, which appeared on the pages of *Literární noviny*. Ivan Sviták, a colleague of Kosík, started the debate with an article castigating the state of social sciences in Czechoslovakia. That was paradoxical in Sviták’s view, given the fact that the main scientific contribution of Marx

⁶⁴ See Kusák, *Kultura a politika*, 394–95 and Petr Šámal, “Cesta otevřená.” For a detailed analysis of the artistic and political development of the group around the journal *Květen*, see Ivo Fencel, *Vize a iluze skupiny Květen* (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1993). For the writers’ congress proceedings, see Michal Bauer, ed., *II. sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů: 22.–29.4.1956* (Prague: Akropolis, 2011).

and Lenin consisted in their method of analyzing social phenomena. He called for a renewal of this fundamental quality of Marxist social theory and for abandoning the political oversight over philosophy premised on the idea that the “most highly ranked person in the Party is always most highly right.”⁶⁵

Kosík joined the discussion on the relationship between ideology and science, a problem that will prominently figure in his work for many years to come. The difference between ideology and science was supposed to consist in the relationship between the system of categories of a given thought and reality. “Ideology sees categories, ideas, thoughts as something autonomous, self-sufficient, absolute, whereas for Marxist theory categories and ideas are expressions of reality, because they express “forms of being or conditions of existence” of reality itself.” Consequently, Kosík thought that one of the main tasks of Marxism was to discover why and how dogmatic thought under Stalin came into being.⁶⁶ For both authors, true Marxism was identical with science and, therefore, incompatible with ideology. Science as an objective discovery of reality and ideology as a subjectivist system and political instrument were, in their view, two distinct ways of thinking and acting. Both philosophers were subsequently harshly criticized for their “revisionist views” by the highest echelons of the Party. At this time tough, it did not mean an immediate danger to their academic position.⁶⁷

The first serious conflict with the Party establishment and his attachment to the concept of autonomous scientific and cultural creation made Kosík less straightforward in his political criticism of nineteenth-century liberal democrats. Yet, the thrust of his commentary on Nejedlý remained. The late 1950s saw Kosík completing in a way his

⁶⁵ Ivan Sviták, “Některé příčiny zaostávání teorie,” *Literární noviny* vol. 5, no. 16 (1956): 5.

⁶⁶ Karel Kosík, “Hegel a naše doba,” *Literární noviny* vol. 5, no. 48 (1956): 3.

⁶⁷ For a broader picture of the Czech Marxist philosophy of the time, see, e.g., Nikolaus Lobkowicz, *Marxismus-Leninismus in der ČSR. Die tschechoslowakische Philosophie seit 1945* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1962), Jiří Gabriel et al., eds., *Česká filosofie ve 20. století. Směry, osobnosti, problémy* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1994). See also the periodization of the process of de-Stalinization of Czechoslovak science suggested by Antonín Kostlán, “Věda v Československu v letech 1953–1963: Zamyšlení nad současným stavem bádání a jeho možnostmi,” in *Věda v Československu v letech 1953–1963*, ed. by Hana Barvíková (Prague: Archiv AV ČR–Agenda, 2000), 567–88.

mostly implicit but steady, decade-long polemic with Nejedlý in two major aspects: the understanding of modern Czech history, especially the period of the "national revival," and the conceptual approach to the history of philosophy. At the same time, in 1958, Nejedlý himself was far from being the main target of Kosík's philosophical and political critique. As previously in the case of Masarykism, Kosík did not feel the need to fight primarily against Nejedlý *per se* as rather against the conscious as well as unconscious followers of Nejedlý's (in fact, Masarykian in its origins) "historical idealism" clothed in Marxist vocabulary. The other major vices of current would-be Marxist thought that Kosík strove to uproot were "vulgar economism," which degraded Marxism merely to a method of identifying external preconditions of certain culture or philosophy, and "abstract doctrinairism," which was content with finding the simplest political or ideological label for any historical phenomenon.⁶⁸

In the realm of political traditions, Kosík strove to put more stress on his methodological perspective applied to correct Marxist interpretations of the modern Czech national movement. He kept the notion of "national-liberation struggle" but connected it to the idea of historical progress and revolution. This way, it was an integral part of the development of European democracy and the "world's revolutionary front." This universalizing Marxist historical perspective naturally continued his criticism of the prevailing idealist, Masarykian bourgeois interpretation of Czech national history, which was simultaneously a substitute for the inherent critique of Nejedlý's national Stalinist interpretation.

Kosík summarized several years of studies and analyses in his major book on *Czech Radical Democracy* in 1958. Alexej Kusák characterized the work as a "bible of Czech communist leftist radicalism."⁶⁹ It seems however that it was more the bible of new Czech Marxist history of ideas, approached from a historical materialist and dialectical point of view, or in the contemporaneous vocabulary "a history of philosophy as philosophy." Kosík stuck to most of his previous motives but applied

⁶⁸ Karel Kosík, "Dějiny filosofie jako filosofie," in Jiřina Popelová and Karel Kosík, eds., *Filosofie v dějinách českého národa (Protokol celostátní konference o dějinách české filozofie v Liblicích ve dnech 14.–17. dubna 1958)* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1958), 9–24.

⁶⁹ Kusák, *Kultura a politika*, 269.

a more “hermeneutical” approach in an effort to understand the social and political activities of the bourgeois democrats from their own class perspective. Kosík examined radical democracy as a specific political and intellectual stream. Unlike in his previous writings, he tried hard to put its evolution into context and to confront it with other ideological and political traditions of the time that, in order to be a credible partner to radical democrats, had to be conceived in their own right. Importantly, he also departed from the previously privileged connection of Czech radical democrats to their Russian counterparts and stressed radical democracy as a universal European phenomenon. His emphasis on the European rather than East European historical context for explaining the “Czech question” and thus the need to understand the current fate of progressive politics in the context of world historical developments already anticipated his political journalism during the 1968 Prague Spring.⁷⁰

Yet in order to understand Kosík as the future “philosopher of praxis,” his turn to the national question in 1968 and his reevaluation of Palacký, Havlíček, and Masaryk, we have to turn to another, perhaps even more consequential area of his thought, that is the epistemological questions in Marxism. It was a prominent topic in the works of other “Marxist revisionist” thinkers in East Central Europe of the time such as the Pole Leszek Kołakowski or the Czech Ladislav Tondl.⁷¹ Kosík’s thinking in this realm followed two major lines, the reconsideration of the history-of-philosophy approach and the overcoming of Stalinist “vulgar economism” in current Marxist social theory.

The national history of philosophy had been a long-debated subject among Czech Marxist philosophers, culminating in a conference on “Philosophy in the History of the Czech Nation” held in April 1958 in the Academy-owned chateau in Liblice near Mělník. The keynote speech by Kosík marked an important turning point from the prevalent conception of the history of philosophy constructed along Nejedlý’s line, which demanded that the attention of historians of philosophy be directed primarily at the “progressive figures” of Czech science, culture, and politics rather than at “scholastic philosophy.” In contrast,

⁷⁰ Karel Kosík, *Česká radikální demokracie: příspěvek k dějinám názorových sporů v české společnosti 19. Století* (Prague: SNPL, 1958).

⁷¹ Cf. Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce*.

Kosík defended a narrow definition of philosophy and the historiography of philosophy as an autonomous field with a specific methodology and perspective.⁷²

Against the attempts to offer an abstract definition of progressive and reactionary elements in the past and against similarly flattening dogmatism, which saw philosophy merely as the search for the simplest class-political or ideological labels, Kosík saw nonsimplified, full-blooded Marxism as the objective knowledge of reality. It was the “reproduction of this reality as a concrete totality that is an evolving unity of essential assessments.”⁷³ Every phenomenon, whether spiritual or material in nature, must be understood and elucidated using its categorization in a specific historical totality, in which it exists and evolves. In Kosík’s view, Marxism worth of its name should provide an analysis of a work of philosophy not just based on the text alone. It must be placed in a given social context, but not as a representative of or derivative from the contemporary economic and social conditions: “Philosophy can influence an entire epoch; it can enter all its spheres and become the philosophy of an epoch only because it is a concentrated intellectual expression of the epoch itself. Philosophy is a conscious intellectual reproduction of the basic problems of its time, which grow out of the real structure of the society and in specific forms influence culture, science, and everyday life.”⁷⁴ This basic generative principle of the Marxist approach to the past had its origin, in Kosík’s view, in Hegel’s understanding of the *Zeitgeist* which—on an idealistic basis—expressed the unity and internal coherence of different forms of social consciousness. In Marx, it is then scientifically explained through an analysis of social being as the summary of different forms of social consciousness including political opinions, philosophical creed, artistic production, moral principles, prejudices etc., which interconnect specific social-historical consciousness as a whole.⁷⁵

⁷² Kosík, “Dějiny filosofie jako filosofie.”

⁷³ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁵ In spite of significant methodological, generational, and intellectual ties, Kosík spoke up against Kołakowski and indirectly against the epistemology of the nascent “Warsaw school of history of ideas,” which, in his view, went too far in reducing the history of philosophy to a history of worldviews. Cf. Josef Zúmr, “Kosíkovo pojetí dějin českého myšlení 19. století.” in Marek Hrubec, Miroslav Pauza, Josef Zúmr, et. al., *Myslitel Karel Kosík* (Prague: Filosofia, 2011), 21–32.

Kosík highly appreciated Hegel's impact in epistemology. Hegel's dialectics and categories of logic inspired him in his criticism of the prevailing Stalinist interpretation of Marx's theory of class as well as of the notion of class as understood in Western sociology. It was Hegel's merit, Kosík wrote, that he conceived of Being as a process, a dialectics of the mediated and the immediate. Whereas Hegel elaborated his theory in terms of logic of notions, Marx redefined it as material process taking the shape of mediation between things and objective reality. Nevertheless, Hegel's scheme of the relationship between the general (abstract) and the singular (concrete) as an organic relationship was preserved. Hence, any real cognition, especially the Marxist one, has to follow the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete, wrote Kosík in his 1958 article that anticipated his concept of the "dialectics of the concrete" elaborated a few years later. The general Marxist categories such as "class," "bourgeoisie," "proletariat," etc. are abstract designations serving as orientation points for a research that, on the basis of concrete historical contextualization, has to convey these notions as "concrete abstractions" of the given notion. Only in this way could the positivist empiricism as well as the mechanistic collection of empirical facts under the heading of unchangeable notions, characteristic of Stalinist Marxism, be overcome. After such an exposition, Kosík moved on to a general critique of "vulgar materialist" (read Stalinist) understanding of Marxism. The latter reduced it to a theory of the primary role of the economic factor, and therefore was a crude misinterpretation of the complexity of Marx's teachings. Economy in Marx's texts did not mean just a distribution of wealth in the society, but more generally, the entire social and economic structure of the given historical epoch. Hence, the notion of "class" that, for instance, Weber understood in strictly economic terms, meant for Marx a "societal totality of various aspects and designations." Thus, true class analysis means a reproduction of reality as a dialectic unity of economy, politics, social, and intellectual life determined by the structure of society.⁷⁶

Such conceptual framework as well the emphasis on Hegel's legacy hint at Kosík's reading of Georg Lukács, especially his early work *History and Class Consciousness*. Kosík did not admit to this source

⁷⁶ Karel Kosík, "Třídy a reálná struktura skutečnosti," *Filosofický časopis* vol. 6 no. 5 (1958): 721–34

of inspiration due to Lukács's contemporary reputation as an arch-revisionist.⁷⁷ According to Sviták's testimony though, the copy of the German original of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, stolen from the University Library in Prague, had circulated in the mid-1950s at the Institute of Philosophy, and influenced not only Kosík but also many of the Institute's younger scholars.⁷⁸

His caution notwithstanding, Kosík along with Sviták, Kalivoda, Tondl, and a few others became targets of the antirevisionist Party campaign in 1958. Symptomatically, it did not bring much harm to most of the criticized intellectuals, which was a great difference from the situation just a few years ago. In Kosík's case, it only enhanced his stature as maverick Marxist philosopher, which echoed positively in the broader cultural sphere and made him into one of the icons of intellectual rebellion and of the 1960s Czechoslovak reform communist movement. If he is sometimes seen as the unofficial philosopher of the reform movement and of the Prague Spring, we have to bear in mind that this was so in two different ways. None of them fully corresponded with the understanding of reform among its major political leaders. The first one is well-known and relates to his Marxist "philosophy of praxis" that he embarked on at the end of the 1950s and that resulted in his most famous work, *Dialectics of the Concrete*, published in 1963.⁷⁹

Based on the renewed interest in the "philosophy of Man" or a Marxist anthropology also inspired by phenomenology and existentialism, Kosík embarked in this volume on a systematic Marxist reconsideration of the relationship between economic structure and human practice. The anthropological dimension in his treatise had clear counterparts in social ontology as well as epistemology.⁸⁰ Kosík's elaborate and philosophically grounded justification of individual as well as collective activity aiming at reconstructing and humanizing the world and

⁷⁷ The Moscow-orchestrated propagandist campaign against revisionism in Marxist thought and communist practice took Lukács as an exemplary case.

⁷⁸ Ivan Sviták, *Devět životů* (Prague: SAKKO, 1992), 113.

⁷⁹ Karel Kosík, *Dialektika konkrétního. Studie o problematice člověka a světa* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1963). English edition: *Dialectics of the Concrete. A Study on Problems of Man and World* (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel, 1976).

⁸⁰ Cf. Ivan Landa, "Kosíkova dialektika konkrétního," in Erazim Kohák and Jakub Trnka, eds., *Hledání české filosofie* (Prague: Filosofia, 2013), 231–59.

the social environment was soon recognized as a ground-breaking philosophical treatise. More generally, it was understood as an emphatic intellectual support for the current Czechoslovak reform movement. It had been read and appropriated as a critical, yet constructive, Marxist philosophical standpoint by hundreds of reform communist intellectuals, artists, and Party activists. Such impact put the hawks in the Party leadership in a difficult position. Even if they understood the subversive potential of the book, due to its unexpected popularity in the cultural press and public discussions, they could hardly intervene ruthlessly against Kosík. The status of celebrity, even among philosophers, brings sometimes particular advantages.⁸¹

Yet the second way that turned Kosík into a (critical) philosopher of the Prague Spring, and which is less known, is his contribution to the discussion on the national question that along with “socialist democracy” formed the backbone of public political discourse in 1968/1969. Kosík stands as a symbol of both: the emancipatory pathos of the reform communist project of “socialism with a human face” delineating itself from capitalist liberal democracy as much as from Stalinist dictatorship; and, the restructured 1968 Czechoslovak (“national” *cum grano salis*) way to Socialism. In his effort to link up historically the project of the Prague Spring to Palacký and Masaryk as the originators of modern Czech “national program,” Kosík represented a broad and undefined “Czech national reform communist” stream within the Party.

The renewed interest in nation-building and nationalism studies in social and human sciences was palpable, in Czechoslovakia, as well as elsewhere in the Eastern bloc in the 1960s.⁸² In contemporary Marxist-Leninist theory, the creation of the “socialist nation” was a priority. It should have had basically three stages derived from Lenin’s theory of nation-building: first, the phase of liquidation of the major antago-

⁸¹ Jan Mervart, “Dialektika konkrétního v zrcadle sporů mezi aparátem ÚV KSČ a kulturní obcí,” in *Myslitel Karel Kosík*, 55–77.

⁸² See, e.g., Jiří Kořalka, *Co je národ?* (Prague: Svoboda, 1969). Cf. also Michal Kopeček, “Historical Studies of Nation-Building and the Concept of Socialist Patriotism in East Central Europe 1956–1970,” in Pavel Kolář and Miloš Rezník, eds., *Historische Nationsforschung im geteilten Europa 1945–1989* (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2012), 121–36.

nisms within the nation following the socialist revolution; second, the further development of the socialist nations, resulting in the leveling of their development; and third, the final stage of confluence of nations leading ultimately to the world-wide communist society. On the basis of these assumptions, some Czech and Slovak Marxist theoreticians made an effort to restructure the Czechoslovakist idea into a "national political society" project based on autonomous development of two distinct nations connected by the principles of the Czechoslovak statehood and socialist patriotism.⁸³ These attempts were grounded in the assumption that the roots of inequality and national tension were mainly in the economic sphere, even though active socialist indoctrination and fight against the old bourgeois nationalist feelings remained important components of the socialist nation-building.⁸⁴

The Marxist historical studies of nations and national movements further challenged the Stalinist neo-Romantic Czech historical master-narrative symbolized by Nejedlý and his *Communists, the Heirs*. The radical Marxist historical reconfiguration of national history and of the progressive traditions provided by thinkers such as Kosík or Kalivoda did not find a direct counterpart in the texts of their fellow Czechoslovak Marxist historians in most cases.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, historical studies in many ways followed a very similar line of inquiry. Marxist historians embraced a broadly conceived research of the national question

⁸³ See, e.g., Jan Šindelka, *Národnostní otázka a socialismus* (Prague: Svoboda, 1966); Erika Kadlecová, *Socialistické vlastenectví* (Prague: SNPL, 1957). Cf. Juraj Marušák, *Slovenská literatúra a moc v druhej polovici päťdesiatych rokov* (Brno: Prius, 2001), 61–87.

⁸⁴ For a longer-term perspective on this assumption that was at the heart of the Czechoslovak statehood and of the liberal as well as Marxist understanding of the Czechoslovak idea, see Vladimír Bakoš, *Question of the Nation in Slovak Thought: Several Chapters on the National-Political Thought in Modern Slovakia* (Bratislava: Veda, 1999); Carol Skalník-Leff, *The National Question in Czechoslovakia 1918–1987* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), esp., 236–40.

⁸⁵ However much Kosík and Kalivoda shared the intention to revive Marxism as a viable epistemological position and philosophical approach and to apply it to historical analysis, they differed significantly in their interpretations of the current situation in the 1960s. See Jan Mervart, "Kosík, Kalivoda, Sviták a Pražské jaro 1968," in Kohák and Trnka, ed., *Hledání české filosofie*, 195–211.

and modern nation-building in the Bohemian lands and Slovakia. The most important and influential of these approaches became the theory of small-nations-building in European history by Miroslav Hroch.⁸⁶ His research had been supplemented by studies on the Czech–German relationship in the last decades of the Habsburg Monarchy as well as by a handful of works devoted to the national question within the Czech, Slovak, and all-Austrian workers movements and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party.⁸⁷ These studies stressed the class antagonisms within the national movement while also applying a more sophisticated and differentiating view of the role and development of the national question within the labor movement in Bohemian lands and Austria. They elaborated more carefully on the mutual conditioning of the base and superstructure in Marxist terms. They portrayed the interplay of the economic-social conditions and the political, ideological and intellectual trajectories in nuanced and dialectical way working with very different methodological instrumentarium from Nejedlý and his generation.

Last but not least, the reformist Marxist historians drew on an alternative line of “progressive historical tradition” derived from or inspired by, to some extent, Kosík’s seminal work on Czech radical democrats. A red line going from the liberal nationalist democratization movement in the *Vormärz* era, through the radical democrats of 1848, the incipient workers movement in the 1860s, to social democracy and its now reappreciated leader Bohumír Šmeral had been drawn

⁸⁶ Miroslav Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas. Eine vergleichende Analyse zur gesellschaftlichen Schichtung der patriotischen Gruppen* (Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philosophica et Historica, Monographia XXIV) (Prague: Charles University, 1968).

⁸⁷ See, e.g., Jiří Kořalka, *Severočeští socialisté v čele dělnického hnutí českých a rakouských zemí* (Liberec: Severočeské nakladatelství, 1963); Jiří Kořalka, *Všenněmecký svaz a česká otázka koncem 19. Století* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1963). Zdeněk Šolle, *Socialistické dělnické hnutí a česká otázka 1848–1918* (Prague: Academia, 1969). See also a popularizing attempt at Marxist historical analysis of Czech nationalism in the nineteenth century by František Červinka, *Český nacionalismus v XIX. století* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1965). What is interesting from our point of view is Červinka’s inspiration by both, Kosík and Nejedlý, even though in the latter’s case Červinka drew mostly on his interwar writings. Cf. also Josef Kočí and Jiří Kořalka, *The History of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Houston: Rise University Press 1966).

in many important historical works.⁸⁸ The unmistakable comeback of the latter gained special importance as an expedient historical tradition for the Party historians at the Institute of Party History and similar institutions. In an effort to historically substantiate the Czechoslovak reform project, they constructed a specific line of radical democratic socialist tradition starting with Šmeral, through the popular front era of communist politics and antifascist resistance movements during World War II, and up to the beginnings of the “Czechoslovak revolution” in the mid-1940s. In this way, the Czechoslovak reform project in the 1960s was seen as the culmination of an alleged historical continuity of democratic socialist endeavors in Czechoslovak history.⁸⁹

The tentative result of the 1960s Marxist historical studies in nation- and state-building as well as modern social and political history was a much more nuanced historical picture of national societies (Czech and Slovak, less so Bohemian German). It not only challenged the organicist view of Nejedlý and his followers, but it put aside the binary categories of progressive versus reactionary national culture, which were derived from Lenin and were still a part of the official Party propaganda and the ideological discourse. Similar results characterized also the other social sciences flourishing in the reformist period. The sociological research of the second half of the 1960s, for instance, was instrumental in providing arguments for the recognition of the variety of “interests” in socialist society as a fundamental motive of the reformist debates. The sociologists maintained that political analysis of social structure necessarily presupposed an analysis of the differentiation of interests among society’s social classes.⁹⁰ Consequently, the political process in socialist democracy should have been understood as an

⁸⁸ For the 1960s renaissance of interest in “Šmeralism,” see, e.g., Kárník, *Socialisté na rozcestí*; Otto Urban, “Bohumír Šmeral a František Modráček jako představitelé dvou ideologických linií v české sociální demokracii před první světovou válkou,” *Československý časopis historický* vol. 11, no. 4 (1963): 432–44; Ján Mlynárik, “Dr. Bohumír Šmeral a slovenská národnostná otázka v počiatkoch komunistického hnutia,” *Československý časopis historický* vol. 15, no. 4 (1967): 653–66.

⁸⁹ See Sommer, *Angažované dějepisectví*, esp., 344–429.

⁹⁰ See the representative collective work of the time: Pavel Machonin, et al., *Československá společnost: sociologická analýza sociální stratifikace* (Bratislava: Epocha, 1969); Cf. Michael Voříšek, *The Reform Generation: 1960s” Czechoslovak Sociology from a Comparative Perspective* (Prague: Kalich, 2012).

assertion of interests of one social group against the interests of other groups, a topic that became a part of open political discussion in 1968.

The political representation of the different social interests (i.e., socialist democracy) and the national question (i.e., the future of the Czechoslovakist project) became the two towering questions of the political process of the Prague Spring.⁹¹ The earlier hope cherished by the Party ideologues and some Marxist theorists that, along with the economic progress, Slovak national sentiments would start to merge with the morally and politically higher socialist patriotism based on the Czechoslovak statehood, proved to be of no avail. In 1968, Slovak self-determination and the federalization of the country's political and administrative system became one of the major Prague Spring concerns, and the effort to save the Czechoslovakist project with the help of socialist patriotism capitulated vis-à-vis deeply ingrained national feelings of the majority population in both parts of the state. Nevertheless, the challenge to the Romantic understanding of national history as contrasted with modern Marxist, class-based historical portrayals in a broader Central European or European perspective reached its climax during these years.⁹²

The political debate of the period gave birth to a tentative and only vaguely formulated "civic socialist" approach to the potential Czechoslovak "political nation-building." It involved a correlation of class and cultural analysis in the notion of the "political nation." It also comprised the reconsideration of the relationship between two distinct but mutually interconnected national societies, Czech and Slovak. Such reappraisal was tied to the project—in broad outline rather than in elaborated detail—of "socialist pluralism." The latter was a model envisaging the re-introduction of the fundamental civic liberties of rep-

⁹¹ For an analysis of the uneven evolution of the reformist project throughout the 1960s challenging the engrained common-place that the Czech reformists strove, above all, for democratization, whereas Slovaks for federalization, see Jan Mervat, *Naděje a iluze. Čeští a slovenští spisovatelé v reformním hnutí 60. Let* (Brno: Host, 2011).

⁹² See, e.g., the popularizing collective work of leading Czech historians trying to deconstruct some of the most engrained nationalist historical myths: František Graus, ed., *Naše živá i mrtvá minulost. 8 esejí o českých dějinách* (Prague: Svoboda, 1968) with contributions by Graus, D. Třeštík, F. Šmahel, J. Petráň, M. Hroch, J. Kořalka, B. Loewenstein, and V. Olivová.

representative liberal democracy as well as the mechanisms for securing the basic rights and freedoms in a political order that preserved its fundamentally socialist character.⁹³

At that point, Kosík, for the last time, intervened at the center of the political discussion. He addressed both crucial issues: socialist democracy and the national question. The most important of his political journalism from that period was a long essay "Our Current Crisis" published as a series during the spring of 1968.⁹⁴ He argued that the historical meaning of Socialism lies in the liberation of man, and Socialism could historically be justified only when it provides a revolutionary and liberating alternative to exploitation, injustice, lies, mystification, lack of freedom, and indignity. Up to that point, Kosík maintained, Socialism did not carry out such promises and instead created, in Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe, "a weird mixture of bureaucratism and Byzantinism, monstrous symbiosis of State and pagan Church." Socialism that amounted only to a change in the means of production was, for Kosík, a farce.⁹⁵

It was not only Socialism, though, that was in crisis in 1968, but the nation too. Kosík returned to his favorite topic of Czech political traditions and reconsidered the classical political responses of past Czech national political leaders such as Palacký, Havlíček, and Masaryk to their time. Unlike his writings of the 1950s, he now exam-

⁹³ See, e.g., the contemporaneous political journalism of Michal Lakatoš, Zdeněk Mlynář, František Šamalík in Jiří Hoppe, ed., *Pražské jaro v médiích. Výběr z dobové publicistiky* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 2004). Cf. also Jozef Žatkuliak, "Iná emancipácia? Česko-slovenská jar a slovenská spoločnosť," in Ivan Šedivý, Jan Němeček, Jiří Kocian, and Oldřich Tůma, eds., *České křižovatky evropských dějin: 1968* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 2011), 91–104.

⁹⁴ Karel Kosík, "Naše nynější krize," in *Století Markéty Samsové* (Prague: Český spisovatel, 1992), 25–62, quotation from p. 35. Originally it came out in the weekly *Literární listy* in April 1968. In English: "Our current crisis," in: Karel Kosík, *The Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 17–51. Not by chance, the title referred to a political treatise of Tomáš G. Masaryk of the same name, from 1895, where Masaryk endeavored to resume and analyze the major elements of the "political crisis" of his time from the perspective of his broader cultural-political program laid out in his *Czech Question*.

⁹⁵ Kosík, "Naše nynější krize," 48–49.

ined their political programs of Austro-Slavism or Czechoslovakism on the basis of moral concepts such as Palacký's devotion (*božnost*) and Masaryk's *Humanität* (*humanita*). Such personalities did not merely represent class-interests, but they endeavored to inscribe the "Czech question" into a European moral and universal framework. Idealist as these approaches were, they represented an effort to elevate "national life" from mere "biological existence" focused primarily on the survival to a full-fledged national-political program. At stake was how to turn the "small nation" in between the great powers (Russia and Germany) into true historical subject. Kosík argued that Czechs have to understand the question of democratic socialism in the same vein: a universal historical problem related to the European and global context of democracy. Nonetheless, the "practical test of the Czech question was after all the Slovak question."⁹⁶ The Czechs' "inability to understand the Slovaks' desire for federation" and the overall ignorance of Slovak emancipation demands was, in his view, derived from the inability of Czech political thought to overcome its basically national Romantic confines and to reach a "statehood level," a necessary condition for keeping the Czechoslovak state alive. Yet despite his sensitivity for Slovak requests, Kosík remained, similarly to most Czech intellectuals of the time, deeply bounded to his own national context. He expressed the Czech part of the wished-for transformation from ethnic to political nationhood; he did not do any effort to understand the Slovak part of the story.

Despite his active support for the Prague Spring, Kosík was a pessimist. In contrast to his earlier belief in existential revolution, he did not really see a chance to change human nature. The Gramscian revolution of man's essence, Kosík wrote, always threatens to turn from man's liberation to man's total manipulation. Following with a critical eye the prevailing "productivist" arguments of the technocratic communist reformers and the developing consumer culture of Czechoslovak socialism, Kosík arrived at a skeptical *Zivilisationskritik* position, not very far from the contemporary views of the Frankfurt school. He was fundamentally pessimistic about the ability of Western democracy to renew its inner forces and reform itself. He had little faith in "Eastern" socialism's capacity to genuinely democratize itself. He thus

⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

anticipated both Czechoslovak critical dissident writings (Jan Patočka, Václav Havel) on the crises of Western democracy and post-totalitarian misery, and—less straightforwardly—the postmodern critique of Western rationality. For Kosík, the major crisis of his time affected both capitalism and socialism. Its thrust was the belief in boundless development of production as the ultimate goal of both systems. Furthermore, it was a crisis of the unbounded historical process of subjectivation that turned individual human beings into accessories of the “system of modern production, the mystified, but the only real historical subject of nowadays.”⁹⁷

Epilogue: 1989—the Victory of the “National Road” over Socialism

Kosík was indeed a philosopher of the Prague Spring. Yet he was its critical and skeptical philosopher. Over forty years old, deeply marked by his disillusion with Stalinism and his own involvement in it, he was no longer an enthusiastic true believer. He wholeheartedly supported the project of “socialist democracy” and kept emphasizing its emancipation potential, even though he was rather pessimistic about the possibility to carry it through in practice. He was a Czechoslovak patriot critical of ingrained nationalist stereotypes. He viewed with growing doubt the Czech reactions to Slovak national emancipation as they were voiced during the free public debates of 1968 and 1969. If there was, for Kosík, a national form (as opposed to national road) of socialism in 1968, it must have been in the sense of the Czechoslovak political nation and its project of democratic socialism. It was an ambitious reformulation of the national-political program inspired by similarly ambitious examples from the past such as that of Palacký or Masaryk. Kosík along with many other reform communist intellectuals during and after 1968 believed that the Prague Spring provided Czechs and Slovaks with a unique historical opportunity that required daring and responsible political and civic action.

Nejedlý, who represented the preceding attempt to square the internationalist socialist ideal in Bolshevik version to particular Czech

⁹⁷ Ibid, 54.

national contexts, was by no means a viable alternative in 1968. His historical-philosophical concept of communists as the heirs of progressive Czech historical traditions and his whole oeuvre clearly had lost most of its attractiveness already a decade before. Even the most sympathetic accounts striving to stress the humanist and Masarykian elements in Nejedlý's work remained skeptical about the possibility to revive Nejedlý as a viable element of Czech or Czechoslovak political and cultural tradition.⁹⁸

Kosík became even more pessimistic and alienated after 1969. It was not only because of the military invasion of Czechoslovakia, but mainly because the military occupation started to be interpreted as a historical proof of the failure of democratic socialism. His mood turned for the worst after 1989, which, from his point of view, was not only the restoration of the worst kind of greedy capitalism possible in his country, but it also brought about the breakup of Czechoslovakia—a danger he warned about in 1968. He saw the clear victory of the “national road” over “Socialism.” With a certain kind of poetic license drawing on the notions of this essay, we might say that the liberal transition engineered by Václav Klaus's governments (1992–1997) represented a specific attempt at a Czech “national road to capitalism.”⁹⁹ The resignation of progressive and emancipatory politics combined with a turn towards nation-centered political culture among Czechs and Slovaks represented developments which Kosík had remarked disapprovingly already in the 1970s and 1980s. After 1989, due to his “nostalgic” 1968-er leftist views and embittered rhetoric, Kosík became yet another “old codger” and persona non grata in the new era of Czechoslovak and Czech democracy and capitalism-building. He was a self-conscious marginal stoutly holding on to his resolution to speak a different, “antediluvian” language in the public debate lam-

⁹⁸ See, esp. František Červinka, *Zdeněk Nejedlý* (Prague: Melantrich, 1969), Oldřich Janeček, “Zdeněk Nejedlý v letech 1939–1941,” *Revue dějin socialismu* no. 6 (1968): 845–74. It is quite significant that Červinka considered Nejedlý as politically progressive in his “leftist realist” period in the 1920s. For the overall reception of Nejedlý's work after 1956, see Křest'an, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 409–28.

⁹⁹ Cf. Martin Myant, *The Rise and Fall of Czech Capitalism. Economic Development in the Czech Republic since 1989* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003).

basting the general loss of poetics and creative potential in favor of the “calculating logic” of global capitalism.¹⁰⁰

It is only after the mid-2000s that Kosík started to be read and reinterpreted again by young left-wing intellectuals striving to find a new identity for genuinely radical democratic thought and politics. In reaction to the economic, social, and political crisis of capitalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they are turning not only to his late, anti-globalization and anti-capitalist writings, but to his earlier works too, such as to the *Dialectics of the Concrete*.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Karel Kosík, *Předpotopní úvahy* (Prague: Torst, 1997); Karel Kosík, *Poslední eseje* (Prague: FÚ AV ČR, 2005).

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, several contributions in the volume Hrubec, Pauza, Zumr, et. al., *Myslitel Karel Kosík*.

CRISTIAN VASILE

*Party Intellectuals and
Romanian National Stalinism*

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the contribution of three significant “party intellectuals” to forging national Stalinism in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania (1965–89). It looks also at how their activities interconnected. The study relies on archival materials (especially, cadres’ files), memoirs, interviews, and other historical sources. In 2012, Vladimir Tismaneanu defined national Stalinism as a political variety within Leninism, different from what is usually called national communism.¹ According to Tismaneanu, national Stalinism “systematically opposed any form of liberalization or democratization. Reactionary and self-centered, it valued autarky and exclusiveness. It adhered to a militaristic vision both domestically and internationally.”² From this point of view, the most important features of the national Stalinist synthesis are: the unflinching emphasis on the communist party’s role; Ceaușescu’s personality

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¹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “What was National Stalinism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. by Dan Stone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 462–79. Do note that this contribution is a revision and expansion on his earlier definition in his *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

² Ibid.

cult resulting in dynastic communism; the celebration of the “socialist homogenous nation.”³

By “party intellectuals” I mean those influential members of the cultural or technical intelligentsia⁴ who joined the communist party and the state apparatus. They were decisively involved in both the personality cult of Ceaușescu and the official ideology of the regime between 1965 and 1989. They were simultaneously intellectuals and ideologues. Alongside the legitimization of the communist party and its leader, Ceaușescu, one of the main roles they played in post-1965 Romania was to prevent ordinary intellectuals and the mass intelligentsia in general to hold views critical of the communist system.

The former ideologue Dumitru Popescu was one of the dignitaries promoted under the two postwar Romanian communist leaders—Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu. A Politburo member, he was perceived in the early 1970s as the party intellectual par excellence. After the 1989 revolution, Popescu embodied the writer who encouraged the malignant nostalgia for national Stalinism⁵ through the agency of thousands of pages of self-serving memoirs, autobiographical novels, and prison diaries.⁶ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, his literary advisor was the well-known poet Adrian Păunescu, one of the most influential spokespersons for Ceaușescu’s propaganda. The lat-

³ Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan Cristian Iacob, “Revisiting the Nature and Legacies of Ceaușescu’s Regime,” in *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History*, ed. by Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 331.

⁴ For the definition of intelligentsia after 1945 in the case of Eastern European countries, see Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 77–78.

⁵ As defined by Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Understanding National Stalinism: Legacies of Ceaușescu’s Socialism,” in *Romania since 1989*, ed. by Henry F. Carey (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 27–48.

⁶ Popescu was a member of the RCP Executive Political Committee (Politburo) until the end of the communist regime. In this capacity, in mid-December 1989, he approved Ceaușescu’s repressive orders including the shooting of Timișoara’s anticommunist demonstrators. As a consequence, he was prosecuted, convicted (initially for genocide), and jailed for two years. As inmate, he started writing his memoirs; see Dumitru Popescu, *Timpul lepros. Jurnalul unui deținut politic postdecembrist* (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 2004).

ter offered Popescu numerous suggestions for improving his political trilogy entitled *The Fist and the Palm*, a 1980s metaphor of communist power in postwar Romania in which he intended to praise Ceaușescu's leadership.

In Romania, recent events and mass media campaigns amounted to massive praise for the talented Păunescu (deceased in November 2010), whose trajectory can be compared with his more famous Russian peer Yevgeny Yevtushenko. But Păunescu was also one of the most important pillars of the personality cult of Ceaușescu. In the 1980s, he seriously undermined the emergence of a potential alternative culture under national Stalinism.⁷ In the 2000s, journalists and historians' praise for him was often characterized by an uncritical approach regarding communist ideology.

Mihnea Mihail Gheorghiu, who knew very well Popescu and Păunescu, is another interesting case of an intellectual who consistently influenced the national ideology of the Ceaușescu regime, especially through the agency of social sciences and arts, and in particular, cinematography. He became editor-in-chief of the Romanian Communist Youth organization's (UTC)⁸ daily, *Scânteia Tineretului* (1944–46), where he worked with the leader of UTC, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Between 1950 and 1960, Gheorghiu was somewhat marginalized being suspected of wartime connections with Western countries (mainly Great Britain, France, and the United States). After 1961, Ceaușescu, Mihnea Gheorghiu's former boss and now head of Department for Organisational Work of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP) (*Direcția Organizatorică a CC al PMR*) rediscovered him and supported his new ascent within cultural bureaucracy. Gheorghiu became one of Dumitru Popescu's colleagues at the Ministry of Culture from 1963 to 1965. Gheorghiu's influence grew after 1965 and some historians perceived him as one of the most important party ideologues.⁹

⁷ Alina Pavelescu, "Idéologiser la culture alternative. Adrian Păunescu et le Cénacle 'Flacăra'," *History of Communism in Europe*, vol. 2 (2011): 51–71.

⁸ UTC—Uniunea Tineretului Comunist (Communist Youth Union). After 1949, Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor (UTM—Workers' Youth Union).

⁹ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 177.

Dumitru Popescu: The Prototype of Party Intellectual

Who was Dumitru Popescu? In 1947 he was a student at the Bucharest University of Commerce. The university was transformed a year later into a Soviet-type Faculty of Economics and Central Planning within the “V.I. Lenin” Institute for Economical Studies and Planning. He joined the party in the early 1950s on pragmatic grounds rather than out of genuine commitment to Marxism-Leninism.¹⁰ However, in his memoirs one can identify a certain repulsion against old social classes as early as 1947, expressed mainly by condescendence toward students of bourgeois and aristocratic origins.¹¹ Popescu probably entered the party (from 1948: Romanian Workers’ Party—RWP) due to a combination of social frustration, opportunism, and careerism.

Based on his party membership file, preserved at the Romanian National Archives, one can sketch out his political biography. Popescu’s mother was a dressmaker from a little town near the Danube River (Turnu Măgurele—Teleorman County).¹² He made the most of the fact that he apparently was not involved in far-right organizations during high school in his native town. His family also had a lower than average living standard. According to his autobiography—dated July 18, 1960 and attached to his cadres’ file—during the anti-Soviet war under the pro-Nazi Ion Antonescu regime, “at the geography and history classes [our professors] taught us in a nationalistic manner. Obviously, some ideas promoted and spread [by them] penetrated my conscience too.” He added: “I strongly disliked the German soldiers and [Marshall] Antonescu.”¹³ Initially, Popescu was recruited

¹⁰ For the same process, see Eric Hanley, “A party of workers or a party of intellectuals? Recruitment into Eastern European Communist parties, 1945–1988,” *Social Forces*, issue 4 (June 2003): 1077.

¹¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se... Memorii*, 6 vols. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005–2007), vol. 1, *Aburul halucinogen al cernelii*, 56–57.

¹² Central Historical National Archives, Bucharest (Arhivele Naționale Istorie Centrale—ANIC), Fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Cadres Section, file P/1149, p. 5.

¹³ ANIC, Central Historical National Archives, Fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Cadres Section, file P/1149, p. 7.

for the Ministry of the Interior but due to a heart disease and other health problems he was recommended for political journalism by Iosif Ardeleanu—his professor of Marxism-Leninism and long-time patron within the communist censorship apparatus (1951–73).¹⁴ Popescu became a member of RWP in 1955 while working with *Contemporanul*, a cultural and political gazette, one of the most politicized journals of the 1950s. Popescu's ideological conformism was essential for his appointment as a member of the Politburo of the Party Youth Organization (*Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor*—UTM). (Among his colleagues was Ion Iliescu, who would later become Minister of Youth and after 1989, Ceaușescu's successor). Moreover, he became editor in chief of *Scânteia tineretului*, the main newspaper of UTM. Ceaușescu, head of department at the RWP Central Committee, strongly supported Popescu's appointment.

In a context of improving relations with the West, Popescu became general director of the official news agency AGERPRES and member of the team which drew up the political discourses of the general secretary of the party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. After 1965 he remained loyal to Ceaușescu. Allegedly the latter attracted him to his team by expounding a novel vision about communism and the party, a national strategy.¹⁵ Popescu considered Ceaușescu as having a multilateral view and representing radical political change.¹⁶ Or, to paraphrase Popescu, the new leader could bring about a deep transformation of the so-called methodology of communism and of realism.¹⁷ For Popescu, Ceaușescu was a patriot opposed to the first generation of pro-Soviet Romanian communists (many of them hard-line internationalists and nonethnic Romanians, especially Jews and Hungarians). However, surprisingly, Popescu praised in his memoirs Leonte Răutu, the leader of the Agitprop for almost two decades. The latter was pro-Soviet and strongly internationalist. Popescu might have been in awe of Răutu's

¹⁴ Liliana Corobca, ed., *Instituția cenzurii în România comunistă, 1949–1977*, vol. I (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2014), 75.

¹⁵ "Dumitru Popescu, zis Popescu-Dumnezeu, despre trei decenii în apropierea lui Ceaușescu," in Lavinia Betea, *Povești din cartierul Primăverii* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2010), 230.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 234–36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

adaptive abilities, who survived the leadership change in 1965 and jumped into the national bandwagon within the party. He strongly supported the national Stalinist line of Ceaușescu. In November 1979, at the RCP Congress, while Ceaușescu was under attack from Constantin Pârvulescu, former party general secretary (1944), Răutu's speech was decisive for legitimating Ceaușescu and for symbolically defeating Pârvulescu's challenge.¹⁸ One can assume that Răutu represented a political model for Popescu.

Adrian Păunescu: Poet and Sycophant of Ceaușescu

Adrian Păunescu opted to support Nicolae Ceaușescu for similar reasons as Popescu. Păunescu (born in 1943) embraced the same political outlook. In the 1960s, he benefited from the party's tendency to broaden its social base, which led to a considerable membership growth. Păunescu's father was a member of the National Liberal Party, a "reactionary" who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for his political beliefs. Moreover, his place of birth was a village in Bessarabia, a province which was—from the Soviet perspective—"occupied" by the Romanian "fascist" army. When Păunescu joined the party, his parents' undesirable political background had a much weaker role in the recruitment than in the early years of the regime. His career gained momentum as interest in incorporating the literary intelligentsia into the party grew in the second half of the 1960s. He was closely linked with UTC and RCP structures especially in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1960 he discovered poetry. Under the guidance of well-known writer Miron Radu Paraschivescu (interwar sympathizer of the RCP), Păunescu became convinced by the fairness of left-wing ideals.¹⁹ From his point of view, the left represented "the cradle of a new mankind." His debut was in *Luceafărul*, an important literary magazine. Between

¹⁸ Vladimir Tismaneanu and Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măștile răului* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2008), 127–28.

¹⁹ Adrian Păunescu, "Vrem să trăim normal! Par a spune greierii din Statele Unite ale Americii," in Ilie Purcaru, *Convorbiri cu... Poezie și politică* (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1972), 100.

1963 and 1968 he studied at the Romanian Philology Department of the University of Bucharest. In 1970, he was appointed deputy editor-in-chief at *Luceafărul*. In 1971, he received a one-year scholarship at Iowa University.²⁰

In an interview of the same year, Adrian Păunescu stated that (political) poetry is somehow a search for necessity. He suggested that the Romanian writers had to enter a dialogue with political power. This was an imperative dictated by History.²¹ He lived almost a year in the USA and was terrified by some aspects of American culture. For example, he decried the helplessness of American poetry to stir up a real interest with the general public. Păunescu concluded that the western type of liberty led to the dissolution of the social fabric. By contrast, in Romania, writers were allegedly privileged in enjoying a new kind of freedom. He made these pronouncements while Nicolae Ceaușescu attempted to re-Stalinize the arts and literature through his notorious 1971 July Theses. Anticipating future developments in Romania, Păunescu compared literary work to liquid: in order to catch the eye of society and its leaders, it had to take the shape of the object it had to fit in (e.g., glass or bottle).

In addition, the poet also considered that a writer had to be an agitator. He declared that: "My passion and my pleasure are to be enslaved to the Romanian nation." Păunescu continued by saying that he is happy to be a poet of the Ceaușescu era.²² In his view, the leader restored the country's dignity and linked it with the nation building process. Freedom is limited by (social and political) duty. When asked by journalist Ilie Purcaru how he felt in the US, Păunescu replied the following: "I felt ill in the US because my country was so far, far away. Americans want money, money, money! They would pursue any business even if it contradicted their personal beliefs. As long as they will earn [money] it is ok."²³

²⁰ Dumitru Micu, "Adrian Păunescu," in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române, P-R*, ed. by Eugen Simion, vol. 5 (Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2006), 135.

²¹ Păunescu, "*Vrem să trăim normal!*," 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 103.

²³ *Ibid.*

A Cultural Ideological Couple: Popescu and Păunescu

Adrian Păunescu became famous as a founder of the *Flacăra* artistic and literary circle (*Cenaclul Flacăra*)²⁴ and in this capacity collaborated intensely with Popescu. As already mentioned, Păunescu became Popescu's literary advisor offering him guidance for improving his trilogy, *Pumnul și palma*.²⁵ When Păunescu received the draft of the first volume in 1979, he exclaimed: "The 'flesh' you put on your novel, even if it is juicy, is not so appetizing without the 'sauce'! So, put more sauce on your work!"²⁶ To translate Păunescu's gastronomic metaphor: "to eat well," the Romanian readers must receive also salt, pepper, and sauce, that is, numerous "historical" facts about 1950s Stalinist dogmatism wrapped in spicy political dialogues and other piquant intra-party details behind closed doors. Predictably enough, in the manuscript, everything from the 1950s was put in negative contrast with the post-1965 "liberalization" allegedly engineered by Ceaușescu. Such an approach characterized both Popescu's aforementioned novel and of his most important autobiographical works—*Chronos Devouring Himself: The Arts during the State Maecenate*.

The third volume of the autobiography is more than a "spicy and juicy" historical novel. It is a romanticized history of the Romanian nomenklatura and high-cultural bureaucracy in the 1960s. In Romanian historiography, Bogdan C. Iacob²⁷ suggested that preeminently in the 1960s the communist regime developed discourses and practices that allowed it to gradually reinvent itself into a national totalitarian movement.²⁸ Especially during Ceaușescu's rule, the RCP and

²⁴ *Cenaclul Flacăra al Tineretului Revoluționar* (The "Flacăra" Circle of the Revolutionary Youth).

²⁵ Dumitru Popescu, *Pumnul și palma, roman, Cartea întâi, O dimineată înșelătoare* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980).

²⁶ Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se*, vol. 3, *Artele în mecenatul etatist*, 234.

²⁷ Bogdan C. Iacob, *Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-Production under Communism in Romania, 1955–1966* (Budapest: Central European University, PhD Thesis, 2011).

²⁸ Along with Vladimir Tismaneanu, Iacob argued that August 21, 1968—the day of Ceaușescu's speech condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—was a turning point for the revival of the communist regime in Romania as a *neo-totalitarian movement*. Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan

its mass organizations embodied this national mass-movement ethos that rehabilitated the founding myths of Romanian identity. The latter reflected the ethnocratic populism promoted in the discourse of the Fascist Legionary Movement and during the dictatorships of Marshall Ion Antonescu and King Carol II. However, significant doctrinal characteristics of Stalinism survived in Ceaușescu's state socialism. In my opinion, this ideological graft represented the crucial prerequisite for the rise of protochronism.

Katherine Verdery remarked that "during the 1970s and 1980s, increasing numbers of Romanian writers and literary critics were drawn into an argument over an idea called protochronism. This idea encouraged critics and literary historians to look for developments in Romanian culture that had anticipated events in the better-publicized cultures of Western Europe (thus, *proto-chronos*: first in time)."²⁹ Essentially, Ceaușescu remained a Stalinist even after 1965. His political socialization was indebted to the Stalinism of the 1930s and 1940s. He and his political elite of the 1970s and 1980s encouraged such protochronist trends, partially inspired by Soviet scientific autochthonous delusions suggesting that almost every world's important achievement could be attributed to Russians or Soviets.³⁰ The leadership in the Kremlin obsessively cited the positive attributes of Russians and their traditions as a means of explaining the special role of the USSR in the world.³¹ This type of shift can be remarked in Romania after 1971/1974. From literary studies, protochronism spread into other academic fields. This phenomenon soon attracted the attention of the party leadership, who was engaged in its own campaign extolling Romania's prestige and special role in the world.³²

Cristian Iacob, "Betrayed Promises: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Communist Party, and the Crisis of 1968," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusions, and Utopia* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 283.

²⁹ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 167–68.

³⁰ Alexandra Tomiță, *O istorie "glorioasă". Dosarul protocronismului românesc* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2007), 120.

³¹ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

³² Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 168.

Cristian Roiban recently defined protochronism as a peculiar discourse about nation, national specificity, national character, national values, and the nation-state.³³ This discourse manifested through the ideology of national Stalinism and it penetrated multiple levels of public and private self-narrativization.³⁴ In the following sections of my chapter, I will suggest that at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s there was a sort of pre-protochronism. Mihnea Gheorghiu was arguably the best case in exemplifying such a phenomenon.

Dumitru Popescu's autobiographical notes confirm my assertion regarding the rehabilitation of the founding myths of national identity under Ceaușescu's socialism, inspired by the ethnocratic populism promoted in the 1930s and 1940s by the conservatives and the far-right. One example of such synthesis was the scandal following the publication of Marin Preda's controversial novel *The Delirium* (1975). Preda was criticized by historians of the Holocaust³⁵ for his empathetic tone regarding former pro-Nazi Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu, who was presented as a tragic hero in the book. Popescu described Ceaușescu's reaction when Preda's historical novel came out in 1975 the following way: "Ceaușescu was not irritated by the way Preda portrayed Marshall Antonescu. Moreover, Ceaușescu did not see any tendency to politically rehabilitate the military dictatorship allied with the Nazis."³⁶ So, in Ceaușescu's opinion—as Popescu asserted—there was no inappropriate empathy from Preda towards Antonescu. The communist dictator's main concern was the fact that the reputable novelist ignored the so-called wartime antifascist underground struggle of the Romanian communists. Although Popescu did not mention this explicitly, Ceaușescu was probably primarily dissatisfied with his absence from the book. During the 1980s, Ilie Ceaușescu, the dictator's brother, began a rehabilitation campaign of Antonescu, the wartime *Conducător* (the same formulation was used for Ceaușescu) of the Romanian state. In the second edition of his *Delirium*, which came out at the end of

³³ Cristian Roiban, *Ideologie și istoriografie: Protocronismul* (Timișoara: Editura Universității din Timișoara, 2014), 369.

³⁴ Ibid. Cristian Roiban uses the concept of *national communism* instead of *national Stalinism*.

³⁵ See Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania, 1940–1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 267.

³⁶ Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se*, vol. 3, 68.

1975, Preda included opportunistically the character of a young communist militant who bears striking resemblance to Ceaușescu.

More significantly, Popescu supported the protochronists (led among others by nationalist literary critic Mihai Ungheanu, a proxy of Eugen Barbu) in their conflict with the Writers' Union (*Uniunea Scriitorilor*). The latter was accused by nationalist intellectuals of having embraced the antinational cause embodied by "the traitors from the Radio Free Europe [Romanian Department]." After he was visited by a delegation of nationalist writers, Popescu noted: "in fact I never had the opportunity to be a witness to such a spectacular outbreak of common sense and critical approach proper to real artists and writers. Such qualities are used in petty enterprises. If by any chance I had been a King, I would have signed immediately the proclamation proposed by Mihai Ungheanu and others."³⁷ In parallel, in the context of an intense struggle for power within the Writers' Union, the court poet Păunescu challenged the leadership of the association although his stand was not necessarily close to the views of Eugen Barbu, Mihai Ungheanu, and other protochronists.

At the end of *Chronos Devouring Himself*, Dumitru Popescu has some suggestions for "normalizing" the political life in Romania. His premises are predictable and based on falsehoods but they are worth mentioning. For example, Popescu makes a comparison with post-1989 Germany: allegedly the West German society was not divided into two different kinds of citizens, good and evil. On the contrary, Romania was the victim of an undesirable anticommunist ideology. From his point of view, the Great Powers unleashed the Ghost (of anticommunism) after 1989 by "accepting the idea of lustration" in East-Central Europe,³⁸ which he considers lamentable. Romania never experienced *lustration*. Nevertheless, the former communist official—jailed for a couple of years after the 1989 revolution—perceived himself as a victim of the postcommunist political system.

Dumitru Popescu's work indirectly fuelled Romanians' nostalgia for communism. Paunescu, his former literary advisor, continued after 1990 to support him, morally and politically. Trained in the party schools of the *nomenklatura* of the 1950s, Popescu embodied the fig-

³⁷ Ibid., 303.

³⁸ Ibid., 264–65.

ure of the party intellectual who strived to rewrite recent history from the viewpoint of the representatives of—in Vladimir Tismaneanu's terms—the fascist Stalinist baroque.³⁹ Păunescu's latent, slightly xenophobic tendencies during communism increased exponentially after 1989. In 1992, Păunescu joined the Socialist Labor Party, "a leading claimant to the legacy of the Romanian Communist Party." A report issued by the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe of the United States Congress in late 1999 expressed concern over the level of antisemitism and racism in Romania. It mentioned that since it lost its parliamentary representation in the 1996 elections, the Socialist Labor Party led by Adrian Păunescu had intensified its nationalist line. Păunescu published two weeklies critical of alleged Jewish interference and participation in Romanian affairs.⁴⁰

In 1971, Păunescu left behind his nonconformism and began to talk in heavily national tones, obsessively praising the Romanian nation and soul.⁴¹ In his columns, Păunescu included beautiful words about competence, arts, necessity of recognition for the property rights, intellectual property. While doing this, he was constantly invoking communist party documents and the directives of the RCP's national congresses.⁴² Very soon the place of those documents and directives was taken by the words of the leader—Nicolae Ceaușescu. Păunescu became one of the chief sycophants of the Ceaușescu regime.⁴³ The years 1971 to 1973 were decisive for his transformation. He was instrumental for the entrenchment of a wooden language in public discourse, which was dominated by concepts such as heroism, patriotism, and abnegation.⁴⁴

Between 1968 and 1970, Păunescu's political-literary ambition and nonconformism came into conflict with Popescu's ideological vision. In his memoirs, Popescu claimed that during those years Păunescu

³⁹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Mitul protocronist și barocul stalino-fascist," *Evenimentul zilei*, February 6, 2008.

⁴⁰ <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw99-2000/romania.htm>; accessed on November 4, 2011.

⁴¹ Adrian Păunescu, *Lumea ca lume* (Craiova: Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1973), 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴³ Tismaneanu and Iacob, "Betrayed Promises," 266n16.

⁴⁴ Adrian Păunescu, "Eroism, patriotism, abnegatie," in Păunescu, *Lumea ca lume*, 11.

was under the political patronage of Gogu (Gheorghe) Rădulescu, an important member of the interwar underground RCP and very influential under Ceaușescu's rule. This alliance made Păunescu oppose protochronism and the rehabilitation of former Legionary Movement intellectuals. In the 1970s and 1980s, Gogu Rădulescu considered himself a sort of political Maecenas, a communist protector of the arts. In this capacity, in 1968, he allegedly backed Păunescu's push for editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Literară/România Literară*, the country's most prominent literary magazine. One of the reasons of his failure was the opposition of Popescu, who at that time did not trust Păunescu.⁴⁵ The latter did not forget this moment and after two years attacked Popescu in front of Ceaușescu accusing him of poetical mysticism. Meanwhile, the political "romance" between Păunescu and Rădulescu ended after 1970-71. The main reason for the break was Păunescu's interview with the Romanian-American historian of religion Mircea Eliade,⁴⁶ a former Legionary Movement follower.⁴⁷ Rădulescu abandoned his support for Păunescu, who instead turned to his former political adversary, Popescu. After less than ten years following their initial conflict, Păunescu and Popescu reconciled.

Mihnea Gheorghiu: The Adventurer and the Revenge of History

Mihnea Mihail Gheorghiu was a complex artistic and academic personality, maybe even more so than Păunescu and Popescu. He was an essayist, a screenplay writer, novelist, playwright, translator, literary critic, historian as well as social scientist. In the 1930s, he belonged to the avant-garde, adopting a left-wing political orientation. He was a communist sympathizer who was also immersed into Western (British, French, American) cultures. Between 1941 and 1944, through his

⁴⁵ Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se*, vol. 2, *Panorama răsturnată a mirajului politic*, 165–70.

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also Mircea Eliade, "Scriu în limba română, limbă în care visez," in Adrian Păunescu, *Sub semnul întrebării*, second, revised edition (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1979), 237–66.

⁴⁷ Florin Țurcanu, *Mircea Eliade, prizonierul istoriei* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2005).

relationship with the painter and stage designer George Tomaziu, Gheorghiu was involved in subversive actions against Marshall Ion Antonescu's pro-Nazi military dictatorship. He spied with French aid for the anti-Nazi powers, especially Great Britain.⁴⁸ However, he maintained his left-wing, procommunist orientation. After the overthrowing of Ion Antonescu in August 1944, he openly confessed his communist allegiance. Between 1944 and 1945, Mihnea Gheorghiu was the editor-in-chief of *Scânteia Tineretului*, the daily of the Communist Youth Organization (UTC). This is where he met Ceaușescu.⁴⁹ In 1946, he became professor at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (1946–48) and at the University of Bucharest (1948–50).⁵⁰ However, two events converged and contributed to Gheorghiu's decline in the 1950s: the ideological verification of Romanian Workers' Party membership between 1948 and 1950; and, in 1949, the arrest of George Tomaziu.⁵¹ At the time the Cold War mindset had reached its peak in Stalinist Romania. Former wartime Anglo-American allies were now the main enemies. In early 1950, Tomaziu was interrogated and he mentioned Gheorghiu as wartime collaborator with the British Intelligence. Almost immediately, in May 1950, the SSI—*Serviciul Special de Informații*, the Romanian secret service, a branch of the *Securitate*—informed the communist leadership, including Iosif Chișinevschi, former head of the Agitprop Department (1945–48) and deputy prime minister, about Gheorghiu's problematic and reactionary past.⁵²

Most probably, Chișinevschi ordered⁵³ the removal of Gheorghiu from the faculty of the two Bucharest universities. For a while, politically, Gheorghiu remained somewhat in the shadows, although in 1954 he regained his professorship at the IATC (Institute of Theater and

⁴⁸ George Tomaziu, *Ţurnalul unui figurant, 1939–1964*, edited by Mariana Mardare and Gabriel Mardare (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1995), 140.

⁴⁹ Răzvan Theodorescu, "Mihnea Gheorghiu," *Revista Româno-Americană*, No. 24, March (2013): 3.

⁵⁰ Dorina N. Rusu, "Mihnea Gheorghiu," in *Membrii Academiei Române, 1866–2003. Dicționar* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică/Editura Academiei Române, 2003), 334.

⁵¹ Tomaziu, *Ţurnalul unui figurant, 1939–1964*, 7.

⁵² Alesandru Duțu, et al., eds., *Romania. Viața politică în documente. 1950* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2002), 169.

⁵³ He was government's responsible with culture, arts, and education.

Film Studies). Two years later, in 1956, he was officially expelled from the communist party after a six-years inquiry performed by the feared *Comisia Controlului de Partid* (Party Control Commission).⁵⁴ However, Gheorghiu continued to publish literary works, predominantly long narrative poems evoking historical events.⁵⁵ He remained a member of the Writers' Union and worked as a translator mainly from English to Romanian. Among the authors that he brought to the Romanian public are William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, Robert Burns, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rudyard Kipling, and Stefan Heym.

After 1960, Gheorghiu was part of a second wave (after a first one in the late 1940s and early 1950s) of intellectuals co-opting within the high cultural bureaucracy and the political elite. His ascension could not be stopped although he was still seen with suspicion by the leaders of the Agitprop Department, especially by Leonte Răutu (at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s Răutu and Chișinevschi formed a sort of ideological tandem). For years, Gheorghiu considered himself an innocent victim of the two. In 1961, probably with the support of Ceaușescu, who controlled the party cadres as head of the RWP Central Committee's Department for Organization and Party Work, Gheorghiu became editor-in-chief of *Secolul 20*, a prestigious magazine promoting world literature and outstanding literary essays.⁵⁶ Two years later, in 1962, he was appointed head of the Film Council within Ministry of Culture. In the latter position he came into conflict with Paul Cornea, the director of the Bucharest-Buftea Film Studio Center (the only location in communist Romania for film production).

Gheorghiu had a national strategy for Romanian cinema but Cornea opposed it, considering it inadequate. Similarly to Gheorghiu, Cornea had joined UTC/UTM in the 1940s and supported wartime actions against Antonescu's dictatorship.⁵⁷ They knew each other from

⁵⁴ ANIC, Central Historical National Archives, Fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Colegiul Central de Partid (Central Party Committee), file No. G/2065.

⁵⁵ Mihnea Gheorghiu, *Întâmplări din marea răscălață. Poem* (Bucharest: ES-PLA, 1953); Mihnea Gheorghiu, *Tudor din Vladimiri: evocare dramatică în cinci acte* (Bucharest: SPLA, 1955).

⁵⁶ Rusu, "Mihnea Gheorghiu," 334.

⁵⁷ Paul Cornea, *Ce a fost. Cum a fost. Paul Cornea de vorbă cu Daniel Cristea-Enache* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2013), 21–38.

the period (1944–46) when both were active in the communist youth press. In the fall of 1958, Cornea was appointed deputy director in the Ministry of Culture and director of the Film Studio by Leonte Răutu. This nomination came despite the fact that a few months earlier he had been accused of a lack of ideological vigilance and therefore dismissed from the same Ministry of Culture. Cornea's reappointment was strange from another point of view, too. He was Jewish and in 1958 the RWP leadership launched a sort of Romanianization campaign within the apparatus. Its victims were mostly party members of Jewish and Hungarian descent.⁵⁸

One should also mention that the ideological purges between 1958 and 1960 affected primarily the cultural ideological institutions controlled by the Agitprop Department led by Leonte Răutu and less the Department for Organisational and Party work headed by Ceaușescu. After 1960, the secret police (*Securitate*) was also purged and there was an upsurge of ethnic Romanian cadres. Among other homogenizing policies, Ceaușescu systematically encouraged the promotion of ethnic Romanians in the ranks of the communist party to the detriment of those representing minority groups. From this point of view, Gheorghiu was an ideal choice: Ceaușescu knew him and he had already showed his national mantle through extensive historical poems and novels praising Romanian heroes from the past. In December 1962, the Cadres' Section within Ceaușescu's Department approved Gheorghiu's request to rejoin the ranks of the party.⁵⁹ A few months earlier, in July, he became head of the Film Council with Ceaușescu's backing, who, by promoting his protégé, undermined the authority of the Agitprop Department, which usually proposed cadres for institutions of the ideological front.

Cornea felt uneasy about Gheorghiu's ambitions. One can catch a glimpse of these dynamics in Cornea's autobiographical book.⁶⁰ The volume sheds light on Cornea's ideological and cultural trajectories and describes his conflicts within certain party-state institutions. In 1958, Cornea returned to the Ministry of Culture, under pres-

⁵⁸ Tismaneanu and Vasile, *Perfectul acrobat*, 51–52, and 108.

⁵⁹ ANIC, Central Historical National Archives, Fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party – Cadres Section, file no. G/47, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Cornea, *Ce a fost*, 138–297.

sure from Răutu.⁶¹ In his memoirs, Cornea suggests that he sought a favorable occasion to leave his political position. Therefore, it is not surprising that he resisted Gheorghiu only for a few years, refusing to become engaged in a protracted battle. In 1965, he resigned the directorship of the Bucharest-Buftea Film Studio Center. Political police (*Securitate*) documents also describe the conflict between Cornea and Gheorghiu. They present it as a sort interethnic dispute between the “righteous” ethnic Romanian Gheorghiu and Cornea, a Jew who injuriously contested the national policies of the communist party leadership.⁶² Such assessments by the secret police represented a huge change in contrast with the situation in the early 1950s when Gheorghiu was essentially viewed as a potential spy in the service of Western countries.

While Cornea—under the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej regime (1948–65)—made the transition from party intellectual to bona fide university professor, expert in sociology of literature, Gheorghiu took the opposite direction. He migrated from university professor status to the high cultural bureaucracy and the position of party ideologue. While Cornea became hesitant from the official ideological point of view, Gheorghiu fully accepted the rules of the game dictated by Ceaușescu within a highly politicized society. Gheorghiu readily embraced state propaganda through film and culture. His victory over Cornea announced the advent of a new generation of party intellectuals in the context of Ceaușescu’s rapid imposition of his cronies within the hierarchy of the RWP/RCP. Something similar happened in the field of official philosophy, especially at the University of Bucharest. Here, Marxist-Leninist professors of philosophy, some of them former Stalinist ideologues and non-ethnic Romanians, presented a sort of critical perspective on the official dogma in the early 1960s. After 1964, some embraced humanistic Marxism. Ceaușescu and, in general, the 1965 power-holders, supported the rivals of this establishment. The challengers were young professors eager to become social

⁶¹ Cristian Vasile, *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2011), 42–43.

⁶² Vasile, *Politicile culturale comuniste*, 277; Teșu Solomovici, *Securitatea și evreii. Despre călăi și despre victime*, Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Ziua, 2003), 359–62.

upstarts and who identified with Ceaușescu's nationalistic pronouncements.⁶³

After Ceaușescu took over the party leadership, Gheorghiu was promoted: first to deputy-minister of Culture, then to vice-president of the Romanian VOKS, the Institute for Cultural Relations Abroad (IRRCS, in 1968), and of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences (ASSP, in 1970). ASSP was a state institution which controlled almost all the research institutes in the humanities and social sciences (before 1970 these bodies were affiliated to the Romanian Academy). Unlike the Romanian Academy, ASSP was directly subordinated to the RCP's Central Committee. In December 1972, Gheorghiu became president of the ASSP.

For Ceaușescu, the creation of the ASSP was the right way of organizing the cultural intelligentsia in order to successfully counter possible ideological dangers either represented by dissenting points of view or by Marxist revisionism.⁶⁴ After 1973, Gheorghiu transformed the ASSP into a sort of device for promoting Ceaușescu's cult of personality,⁶⁵ thus competing with the poet Păunescu.

Initially, until around 1970, Gheorghiu continued to use Vladimir I. Lenin as a main reference together with Romanian heroes from the past. In an essay from 1969 he stated that "the respect for the particular historic features of every nation was a feature of the classic theorists of scientific socialism. Lenin always and insistently recommended the study of the history and economy of all national movements, including [those from] the Tsarist Russia."⁶⁶ In parallel, Gheorghiu compared Romanian national hero and early nineteenth-century revolutionary Tudor Vladimirescu with a Socialist militant, inferring a sort of pre-protochronist orientation.⁶⁷ In the following years, Gheorghiu exploited the

⁶³ Cristian Vasile, "1968 Romania: Intellectuals and the Failure of Reform," in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968*, 243.

⁶⁴ Cosmin Popa, *Uzina de propagandă: Academia de Științe Sociale și Politice (1970–1989)* (Bucharest: Institutul de Istorie Nicolae Iorga, 2015), 9; see also Cosmin Popa, "Academia de Științe Sociale și Politice sau stalinism 2.0," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Contemporană*, No. 14 (2015): 62–90.

⁶⁵ Popa, *Uzina de propagandă*, 104.

⁶⁶ Mihnea Gheorghiu, *Dionysos. Eseuri lirice* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969), 299.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

historical circumstances which favored the rapprochement and interweaving between Ceaușescu's ideology of national Stalinism and (pre) protochronism. The advance of the latter trend may be understood mainly in connection with the 1971 "July Theses" and the Five-Year Plan. The background for these transformations was Ceaușescu's radicalized tone against the autonomy of art and literature.

(Pre)protochronism meant also Dacomania (or Thracomania—from *Dacians*, the ancestors of Romanians, who were a *Thracian* tribe). Gheorghiu's contribution to the field is not negligible. After 1975, he and other RCP ideologues (especially Popescu) combined the development of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory with elements of protochronism and Dacomania. They encouraged Ceaușescu's relations with Romanian Italian industrialist Iosif Constantin Drăgan. The latter—accused by various historians of being associated with the Legionary Movement⁶⁸—left Romania in the 1940s to live in Italy and Spain. After 1965, he became increasingly associated with communist officials and tried to impose his "thracological" expertise in Romania. He was after all a passionate amateur historian as he channeled his energies and financial resources into reinventing the Romanians' ancient past. Under Drăgan's influence,⁶⁹ Ceaușescu pushed for the establishment of a Thracological Studies Institute (*Institutul de Tracologie*) and later suggested Romanian writers to focus on literature on Dacian subjects.⁷⁰ He embraced the idea of honoring the rediscovered ancient Dacian King Burebista. In 1977, Ceaușescu decreed the year 1980 as the (arbitrary) "2050th anniversary on the creation of the first centralized and independent Dacian state under the leadership of Burebista." On October 26 and 27, the Plenum of the RCP's Central Committee

⁶⁸ Francisco Veiga, *Istoria Gărzii de Fier, 1919–1941. Mistica ultranaționalismului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 287; Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, and Mihail E. Ionescu, eds., *Final Report* (Iași: International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania—Editura Polirom, 2005), 274.

⁶⁹ ANIC, Central Historical National Archives, Fond Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Propaganda and Agitation Department, file no. 11/1978.

⁷⁰ May 1977 Speech of Ceaușescu held at the national conference of Romanian Writers; see Nicolae Ceaușescu, *România pe drumul construirii societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate*, vol. 14, *Rapoarte, cuvântări, interviuri, articole. Ianuarie 1977–Septembrie 1977* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1977), 428–29.

approved the controversial anniversary, which was not based on consistent historical documents or artifacts.

Obviously, Ceaușescu, who aspired at a homogenous nation-state, similar to the imagined ancient Dacian one, wanted to be identified with Burebista. He therefore ordered the making of a movie to honor the Dacian King. In this context, at the end of the 1970s, Gheorghiu—who was also the academic patron of the Thracological Studies Institute—skillfully succeeded to impose himself as screenplay writer for the film. He took on the task of allegedly observing the “historical truth,” as demanded by the secretary general of the RCP.⁷¹ Most of his collaborators for the screenplay were social scientists who in fact worked under Gheorghiu’s tutelage within the ASSP. The text written by Gheorghiu entitled *Fierul și aurul. Burebista – The Iron and the Gold: Burebista* was published in 1980.⁷² It was both a showcase of protochronist literature⁷³ and an example of film propaganda used as a weapon for political indoctrination and social control.⁷⁴ The film *Burebista*—released in September 1980 and directed by Gheorghe Vitanidis (who had previously worked with Gheorghiu on other movies)—became one of the main products of Dacomania and protochronism. Even the ancient Thracian slave and gladiator Spartacus became a hero in this movie.⁷⁵ Burebista was a spiritual heir of Spartacus and a revolutionary of sorts. Historian Bogdan Jitea remarked that through this Spartacus–Burebista parallel, the Marxist-Leninist ideology joined hands with Romanian ethnocentrism. Moreover, the movie showed how Burebista imagined a reform program which seemed a sort of communism *avant la lettre*.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain dans la période communiste. Représentations de l'histoire nationale* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011), 373–90.

⁷² Mihnea Gheorghiu, “Burebista,” in Mihnea Gheorghiu, *5 luni ca spectacol. Teatru comentat*, edited by Medeea Ionescu (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1980).

⁷³ Bogdan Jitea, “Protochronismul în cinematografie. Cazul *Burebista*,” *Destin românesc*, vol. 67–68, nos. 3–4: 252–60.

⁷⁴ On film propaganda in dictatorial regimes, see James Chapman, “The Power of Propaganda,” *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 35, no. 4 (2000): 680.

⁷⁵ According to the script, Calopor, one of Burebista’s nephews, fought in the army led by Spartacus; Cf. Jitea, “Protochronismul în cinematografie.”

⁷⁶ Chapman, “The Power of Propaganda,” 680.

Despite such autochthonism-centered endeavors, Gheorghiu was interested in Western literature about film and probably read Richard Taylor's 1979 volume on *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*. Taylor stated that "the significance of propaganda in the politics of the twentieth century continues to be underestimated." Perhaps Gheorghiu tried to confirm in practice Taylor's statement. In order to please Ceaușescu, his screenplay for *Burebista* exacerbated the role of film propaganda as a means of mass persuasion.

In an unusual historical twist of fate, between 1981 and 1983, Mihnea Gheorghiu was appointed by Ceaușescu as deputy head of the Propaganda Section of the RCP's Central Committee.⁷⁷ Gheorghiu, unfairly suspected in the 1950s of spying for capitalist Western countries, dismissed and marginalized by leaders of the Agitprop (Leonte Răutu and Iosif Chișinevschi), reached, thirty years later, the position of his former persecutors.

Conclusions

In many cases personal relationships, and a desire for power or influence, was a more important factor in shaping intellectuals' ideological careers than ideas and intellectual commitments. Both Dumitru Popescu and Adrian Păunescu—and the significant influence of protochronism in the cultural field—decisively contributed to the personalization of power in Romania, that is, to the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Intellectuals, prominently represented by the characters presented in this chapter, were engaged in a generalized mystification of important political ideas such as freedom, democracy, or socialism. Along the way, Popescu, Păunescu, and protochronism stifled alternative and reform-oriented cultural manifestations, while also supporting the continuation of Stalinist patterns of domination after 1989.

In his turn, Mihnea Gheorghiu endorsed Ceaușescu and his so-called national strategy both academically and artistically. Ceaușescu's

⁷⁷ "Gheorghiu Mihail Mihnea," in Liviu Marius Bejenaru, Clara Mareș, Florica Dobre, et al., eds., *Membrii CC al PCR 1945–1989. Dicționar* (Bucharest: Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității–Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 292.

tremendous interest in self-promotion and international recognition relied on Gheorghiu's skills and excellent knowledge of American, British, and French cultures. In fact, during the 1980s, Gheorghiu headed a sort of Council for Cultural Diplomacy within the RCP's Central Committee. Gheorghiu was more versatile than other ideologues of late state socialism. He survived after 1989 as member of the Romanian Academy, where he became head of the Visual Arts and Architecture Section. Very few scholars have dealt in the past two and a half decades with his postwar political biography. Moreover, due to his ability to navigate the perilous waters that lay between Ceaușescu's family and artistic/scientific milieus, he is remembered rather fondly by some contemporary, influential intellectuals.⁷⁸

The three party intellectuals presented in the chapter were very important in establishing a significant degree of legitimacy for the national Stalinist trend initiated by Ceaușescu after 1965. All of them intensely acted for almost two decades in order to prevent any tension in the relationship between the political regime and its intellectuals. Their actions were even more important for Ceaușescu by the 1980s, when all communist regimes found themselves in deep economic crisis and were confronted with ideological decay and the demoralization of the population, particularly young people.⁷⁹ Former influential members of the UTC/UTM (including Popescu, Păunescu, and Gheorghiu) subverted the emergence of a potential alternative culture to Ceaușescu's socialism in the 1970s and the 1980s within the Romanian youth and intelligentsia. They were instrumental in channeling the resurgent post-1960s Romanian national(ist) pride for the preservation of the status quo.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ For example, at the end of 1980s, fearing that Ornea, an influential editor of Minerva Publishing House, could delay the publishing of his father's works (renowned philosopher Lucian Blaga, banned at the beginning of the communist regime, that is, 1948–65), Dorli Blaga successfully intervened through Mihnea Gheorghiu, president of the ASSP, to speed up the publication. See also Răzvan Theodorescu, "Mihnea Gheorghiu," *Revista Româno-Americană*, No. 24, March (2013): 3.

⁷⁹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), ix.

⁸⁰ For the use and abuse of such type of ethos in Romania before and after 1989, see Tismaneanu and Iacob, "Betrayed Promises," 262.

Part Four

LESSONS AT THE TURN
OF A CENTURY

JEFFREY HERF

*At War with Israel:
Anti-Zionism in East Germany from the
1960s to the 1980s*

One of the most remarkable episodes in the history of communism and the radical left in Germany and in Europe after World War II is also one that has received much less attention than it deserves. I refer to the decision by leaders of the German Democratic Republic or East Germany (GDR for short) to participate in the Soviet bloc campaign of antagonism toward the state of Israel, especially from the mid-1960s to the end of the Cold War in 1989.¹ By “antagonism” I refer to a continuum of actions. They included hostile propaganda aimed at the delegitimation of Israel’s moral standing which the East Germans published and broadcast in their official press and media and which they repeated in the United Nations and other international venues. The East German regime described Zionism as racism; depicted every one of Israel’s efforts to defend itself against its Arab adversaries as acts of aggression and, on occasion, mass murder; called Israel a “spearhead of American imperialism”; celebrated Arab and Palestinian armed attacks on Israel as legitimate elements of an anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggle. The East German dictatorship never accepted any of Israel’s factual assertions about events, said nothing about terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians and never criticized antisemitic, that is, anti-Jewish propaganda coming from the Arab governments and Palestinian terror organizations aimed at Israel and Zionism. As Israeli civilians

¹ This essay draws on Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

were killed in terrorist attacks, the East Germans and the Soviet bloc insisted all of this had nothing to do with antisemitism, as if the murder of civilians would have made it acceptable if it was not due to that ideological tradition.

Yet the East German government did not limit its antagonism toward Israel to propaganda and diplomacy. As the archives of the East German Defense Ministry, the Ministry of State Security (MfS, commonly known as the Stasi, and the files of the governing Politburo) document, the GDR enthusiastically joined the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies in offering military training and weapons to both the Arab states and to Palestinian terrorist organizations engaged in armed attacks on Israel. Had its policies succeeded, it is probable that the Jewish state would have been destroyed in the 1970s or 1980s. To be sure, the GDR's antagonism pales when compared to the Holocaust. Yet despite the relative neglect of the topic by too many historians, the hostility of a *German* and *communist* regime to Israel was not and is not an insignificant fact. The East German communist leaders convinced themselves that a campaign of "anti-imperialist solidarity" placed them on the side of a dialectic of imperialism and revolution and that the Jewish state deserved opprobrium because it was on the wrong side of that global conflict.

In 1997, in the volume *Divided Memory*,² I wrote a history of the antic cosmopolitan purges of the early postwar years in East Germany. The East German chapter of a campaign more famously associated with the Doctors' Plot in Moscow and the Slánský Trial in Prague led to an identical shift in the policies of the Communist regimes. Their solidarity with the Jews in Europe and the Soviet Union's and Czechoslovakia's consequential support for the Zionists from 1945 to 1948 vanished and was replaced by denunciations of Zionism filled with classic antisemitic conspiracy theories about the power of the Jews and their links to American imperialism. The ascendant Stalinists marginalized, arrested or drove into exile those communists, such as Paul Merker and Leo Zuckerman, who thought that the logical outcome of wartime antifascism should be support for the Jewish state against the reactionary Arab oligarchies and also against the Islamists and

² Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Arab nationalists who had supported the Nazis during World War II. Marxist-Leninist ideology about the global anti-imperialist struggle fit well with the conventional power-political interests of an East German regime which was desperate for diplomatic recognition from states outside the Warsaw Pact.

From the mid-1950s to the spectacularly successful diplomatic breakthrough of spring and summer 1969, Walter Ulbricht, his successor Erich Honecker, and their diplomats led by Foreign Minister Otto Winzer realized that the single most powerful card they had to play in order to break West Germany's effort to prevent such recognition (called the Hallstein Doctrine) was the GDR's well-deserved reputation for antagonism to Israel and for support for the Arab states during and after the Six-Day War of 1967. In 1969, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Egypt became the first noncommunist regimes to establish diplomatic relations with the GDR. In 1970 in East Berlin, it became the first state in the Soviet bloc to open a Consulate for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). In the coming decade, the GDR became a popular member of the third worldist majority in the UN General Assembly as well as an active member of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

In the present contribution, I first want to underscore the enormous enthusiasm, initiative, and passion with which the GDR threw itself and its modest but nevertheless real political, ideological, and military resources into the battle against what became a hated and despised Zionist enemy. To be sure, the driving force of Soviet bloc anti-Zionism was the Kremlin leadership but the GDR was not a reluctant participant. Quite to the contrary, it took as leading a role as possible for a small state with a population of 17 million people and an economy that was very far from the myth of being the world's eleventh largest. The GDR took its anti-Zionist position after the anticommunist purges of 1949–1953 because communism and anti-Zionism became synonymous. Only with great difficulty could a supporter of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state remain in a Communist Party or support a communist regime. As my work in the archives indicates, familiar denunciations of Zionism that came from East Berlin expressed the genuine ideological passion that the GDR leadership voiced in private when they spoke to one another, to their fellow communist allies, to Arab states, and to the Palestinian terror organizations.

My second point concerns the fact that the East German dictatorship was a government and as such it had the attributes of a dictatorship's sovereignty, including armed forces, a controlled press, embassies and consulates around the world, and justly famous secret police and intelligence agencies. It had, in short, the sinews of war and it employed them in support of Israel's Arab adversaries. Although on a few occasions, the East Germans contemplated sending East German soldiers to fight the Israelis, the Soviet leaders and perhaps some East German communists as well understood that few apart from the Arab states, the PLO and its many armed factions, and radical leftist terrorist organizations would understand or support Germans (even communists from East Germany) aiming guns and bombs at the citizens of Israel. While East German soldiers did not appear on the battlefield shooting at the Israelis, their support for the Arab and Palestinian terrorist wars with Israel extended from propaganda to extensive military training, intelligence cooperation, and delivery of weapons.

While East Germany's partisanship for the Arab states and its denunciation of Israel and Zionism long preceded the Six-Day War of 1967, the war was less a turning point than a manifestation of by then well-established views. On June 7, 1967, two days after the Six-Day War began, the Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party, the ruling party of communist East Germany, met to consider the events in the Middle East. Among its members were Walter Ulbricht, Friedrich Ebert, Gerhard Grüneberg, Fritz Hager, Erich Honecker, Herman Matern, Günter Mittag, Albert Norden, Will Stoph, Erich Mückenberger, Paul Verner, Herbert Warnke. Otto Winzer, Wolfgang Kiesewetter, Gerhard Weiss, and Paul Markowski from the Foreign Ministry were in attendance.³ The group sent messages to Gamal Abdul Nasser and Hafez al-Assad in which "the GDR offered material support to both states in connection with the Israeli aggression." Foreign Minister Otto Winzer was assigned to contact the general secretary of the Arab League and to condemn Israeli aggression and express solidarity with the Arab states and to convey these sentiments to the members of the Arab

³ "Protokoll Nr. 7/67 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 7. Juli 1967" Bundesarchiv Berlin, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter BAB SAPMO) DY 30/J IV 2/2/1117, p. 1.

League. The Politburo ordered its "Agitation Division" (Abteilung Agitation) to inform the press about the events in the Middle East. Special emphasis was to be placed on "the international legal position of the Arab states, Israel's aggressive role, and its conspiracy with the USA, Great Britain and West Germany. The media should emphasize the GDR's anti-imperialist stance."⁴ The National Council of the National Front, led by Albert Norden was to publish "statements by Jewish citizens of the GDR which express indignation about the Israeli aggression and the Israel–Washington–Bonn conspiracy."⁵

The Politburo then ordered Willi Stoph, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to see that East German "weapons and equipment now in the UAR [that is, Egypt]" could be "used according to their [the Egyptian and Syrian governments'] own judgment," and to "give priority to fulfilling the requests of the UAR and the Syrian Arab Republic for deliveries of goods in the non-civilian [i.e., military] area."⁶ Stoph was to send medical supplies to Egypt and Syria; make preparations for accepting their wounded soldiers and children "whose parents were victims of Israeli aggression" and to send unspecified specialists from the GDR to support the Arab states. Finally, the "German-Arab Society" in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry was ordered "to organize measures of solidarity with the Arab peoples."⁷

On June 15, 1967, Walter Ulbricht delivered a major address in Leipzig that became a classic statement of communist anti-Zionism. It was front-page news in *Neues Deutschland*.⁸ Whereas Islamists have incorporated the conspiracy theories of European antisemitism, theories that place an international Jewish conspiracy at the center of their hatreds, Ulbricht placed "US imperialism" and its "global strategy" at the center of his concerns. He wrote that along with the war in Vietnam, the imperialists were conducting "another, no less criminal mili-

⁴ "Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 7/67 vom 7.8. 1967; Betr.: Maßnahmen im Zusammenhang mit der Situation im Nahen und Mittleren Osten," BAB SAPMO DY 30/J IV 2?2/1117, p. 7–8.

⁵ Ibid., 8–9.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ On East German Communism, see Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Herf, *Divided Memory*.

tary aggression in the Middle East.”⁹ The causes of the war did not lie in Arab threats to destroy Israel, movements of Arab armies closer to Israel’s borders, demands that UN peace keeping forces be withdrawn from the Sinai or Nasser’s decision to blockade the Gulf of Aqaba. Instead, they lay in the desire of “imperialist colonial rulers” to prevent the Arab countries from attaining economic independence and to secure “imperialist exploitation” of the riches of the region, that is, access to its oil. The Israeli government had made itself into a “tool of a new, despicable imperialist aggression” and had “brought shame and disgrace on itself by playing the role of an imperialist aggressor against the Arab states.”¹⁰

Ulbricht attacked West German restitution payments to Israel. Israel had been “pumped full” of military goods by the US and West Germany, including “several hundred million dollars” of goods sent by West Germany as “restitution” for “the Jewish citizens of Poland, Czechoslovakia and many other countries murdered by the Nazi regime.” The Six-Day War, he continued, was not a matter of “the survival of the Jews.” Rather it was about a “class conflict between monopolistic oil interests and their imperialist governments on the one hand, and the Arab peoples, on the other.” The imperialists wanted to prevent Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and other Arab states from following a “noncapitalist” path. It was both shameful and “tragic” that Israel placed itself in the service of such “imperialist aggression” because many people in Israel “have our sympathy” in view of what they endured under Nazism. Rather than have regard for human rights, “the government and militarists of the state of Israel [then still led by the Labor Party] are apparently struck with blindness, due to chauvinism, racial madness, and *Klassendünkel*” so that they “believe that they can violate the demands of international law.”¹¹

⁹ Walter Ulbricht, “Aus der Rede des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Walter Ulbricht, auf einer Wahlversammlung in Leipzig zu Frange der Lage im Nahen Osten und zur westdeutschen Expansionspolitik im Rahmen der USA-Globalstrategie (June 15, 1967),” in *Der DDR und die arabische Staaten. Dokument, 1956–1982*, ed. by Wolfgang and Angelika Bator ([East] Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1984), 115–19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹¹ Ibid.

In fact, in 1967, the United States was not a major weapons supplier of Israel, a fact that did not deter Ulbricht from claiming that the US imperialists had helped to “prepare the aggression as part of US global strategy” and had even “fixed the date of the aggression.” Had the United States “told its war loving tool (*kriegslüsternen Werkzeug*) Israel that a war could not take place, then the Israeli militarists and their government would have had to abandon the aggression.” The war could not have taken place “against the will of US imperialism.” Conversely, the Soviet Union had “done everything” it could to prevent a war. Ulbricht expressed thanks to the Soviet Union for its “great sense of responsibility” that led it to try to “stop the aggression,” end the fighting and bring about a withdrawal of Israeli troops.

He further claimed that Egypt and Nasser had not wanted war either. There “was no military threat to Israel.”¹² Now, in the interest of world peace, “the Middle East aggressor,” must be held in check. “The world cannot accept that a quarter century after the Second World War, the aggressor Israel and its men behind the scenes (*Hintermänner*) create a ‘Sinai protectorate’ or a ‘General government of Jordan’ for renewed colonial oppression of the Arab peoples.”¹³ By using terms such as “Sinai protectorate” and the “General government of Jordan,” Ulbricht evoked language that he knew his listeners would associate with Nazi Germany’s policies in Eastern Europe in World War II. The association of Israel with Nazi Germany remained an element of Communist, Arab, Palestinian, and West German and West European leftist anti-Zionism.

Following the Six-Day War, Soviet leaders decided on a program of rearmament and intensified training of the armed forces of the Arab states and of the PLO. They concluded that the cause of the debacle of 1967 did not lie in the inferiority of Soviet weaponry. On the contrary, they asserted that Soviet weapons were superior to those in Israel’s arsenal. The problems lay instead with deficiencies in leadership and training in the Arab states. In order to facilitate a victory in the next war, the Brezhnev regime decided to intensify military training both in the Soviet Union and in its Warsaw Pact allies. East Germany was to

¹² Ibid., 117–18.

¹³ Ibid., 118.

play a central role in this effort. It was manifest in a series of bilateral agreements for weapons deliveries, military training of officers in East German military academies, and regular consultations between high ranking officers.

By 1969, Ulbricht's passionate support for the Palestinians extended to proposing that East German "volunteers" join in a "war of attrition" against Israel in a letter to Leonid Brezhnev. Ulbricht shared the letter with the Politburo members as well as with Erich Mielke, head of the Ministry for State Security and General Heinz Hoffmann, head of the East German Ministry of National Defence. On October 24, Erich Honecker wrote to Ulbricht to report that both the Politburo and Mielke and Hoffmann agreed with Ulbricht. Writing to "Dear Comrade Leonid!" Ulbricht informed the leader of the Soviet Union that the Central Committee of the SED in its Politburo meeting of October 7, 1969 agreed with his "suggestions." As Israel, in association with the USA and the West German Federal Republic, was "systematically engaged in a war of attrition against the Arab states, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive international political action and a war of attrition against the Israeli troops in the occupied territories."¹⁴ The East German Politburo supported a common declaration of the communist parties which stated that in the occupied territories, Israel was "conducting a policy of colonial exploitation, oppression, and violence against the Arab population," and called for withdrawal of Israeli troops from those areas. He proposed sending "volunteers from the socialist countries" to serve "flyers, tank commanders (drivers), and special forces" in fighting the Israelis.¹⁵ Brezhnev appears to have understood the propaganda disaster that East German soldiers fighting against Israel would have entailed. As far as I know, nothing came of it at least then. In her important 1994 work, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern: Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und der Staat Israel*, Ange-

¹⁴ Walter Ulbricht to Leonid Brezhnev, "An den Generalsekretär des ZK der KPdSU Genossen Leonid Iljitsche Breshnev," October 17, 1969, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen (SAPMO) Büro Walter Ulbricht, DY 30/3666, pp. 114–20.

¹⁵ Ibid., 118–20. Also see W. Ulbricht to P.A. Abrassimow, Berlin, February 3, 1970, BAB, SAPMO, Büro Walter Ulbricht, DY 30/3666, p. 159. Angelika Timm, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern: Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und der Staat Israel* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997), 234.

lika Timm included the text of Ulbricht's remarkable offer to have East German soldiers participate in military action against Israel, that is, to have German soldiers shooting at Jews for the first time since 1945. In the more than twenty years since its publication, Timm's revelation aroused remarkably little if any interest and commentary among the growing number of German historians and historians of Germany and post-1945 Europe.

Perhaps East Germany's diplomatic successes of spring and summer 1969 reinforced the Central Committee's enthusiasm in October 1969 for sending young Germans to fight against Israel. For it was in spring and summer 1969 that the anti-Zionist card paid big political dividends. On April 30, 1969, Iraq became the first noncommunist government to establish diplomatic relations with the GDR.¹⁶ The breakthrough was due, in part, to the persistent efforts of East German Foreign Minister Otto Winzer. He displayed his hostility to Zionism and to placing priority on the memory of the Holocaust, during the antic cosmopolitan purges in East Berlin in 1953.¹⁷ The joint declaration issued by Winzer and Iraqi Foreign Minister Abdul Karim al-Sheikhly on May 10, 1969 at the conclusion of Winzer's successful week in Bagdad made a clear connection between Iraq's decision to establish diplomatic relations—and thus break with the Hallstein doctrine—and East Germany's position regarding Israel. The two Foreign Ministers stressed the “commonalities of struggle of both friendly regimes and peoples against the forces of imperialism, neo-Nazism, colonialism, and Zionism,” and “the need for closer cooperation of both states and peoples as well as all anti-imperialist forces in order to check the maneuvers of imperialism and Zionism.” The Ministers denounced Israel's “terror, campaigns of repression and forced evacuations against the Arab people.” Israel, they proclaimed, “is racist, imperialist, reactionary, and aggressive.” It was the “spearhead of imperialism in the Arab world and it threatened peace and international security. The peoples of the GDR and Iraq will struggle fiercely in a common front against this situation.” Winzer and Scheikhly also denounced the military and political support for Israel by the US and

¹⁶ See Timm, *Hammer*, *Zirkel*, Davidstern, chs. 7–9.

¹⁷ On Winzer's attack on Leo Zuckerman's association of the Jews with democracy, see Herf, *Divided Memory*, 130–32.

West Germany. The East Germans underscored “the sympathy of the regime and the people of the GDR for the just struggle of the Palestinian Arab peoples against Israeli aggression” and recognized the rights of the Palestinians for “self determination and resistance against Israeli occupation.”¹⁸

The description of Israel as a racist state, an imperialist spearhead, and even as a state similar to Nazi Germany was thus embedded in the beginnings of diplomatic relations between the two states in 1969, six years before the United Nations “Zionism is racism” resolution of November 1975. In recognizing the Palestinian “right of resistance against Israeli occupation,” the joint declaration also legitimated Palestinian terrorism against both Israeli forces in the West Bank and Gaza as well as against Israel proper. The charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization called for the replacement, that is, destruction, of the Jewish state and a right of return of Palestinian refugees which would also have meant the end of Israel. The East Germans never publically called for the destruction of Israel but neither did they ever publicly reject calls to do so by others.

The anti-Zionist/anti-Israeli card shattered the Hallstein doctrine as diplomatic recognition was granted by Sudan (June 3, 1969), Assad’s Syria on June 5, 1969, Nasser’s Egypt as well as by South Yemen on July 10, 1969.¹⁹ In view of East Germany’s economic and military assistance to the Assad regime in the following twenty years, it is important to note the phrasing of the statements that accompanied the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1969. Winzer stated that the establishment of relations between East Germany and Syria would be “an effective blow against the alliance of the forces of imperialism and Zionism in the Middle East, and especially against the alliance of aggressive West German imperialism with aggressive Israel.”²⁰ In

¹⁸ “Aus dem Gemeinsamen Kommuniqué über den Besuch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Otto Winzer, in der Republik Irak-vom 6. Bis 11. Mai 1969,” Bagdad (May 10, 1969), in Bator and Bator, eds., *Der DDR und die arabische Staaten*, 147.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153–69.

²⁰ “Rede des Ministers für Auwwärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Otto Winzer, bei der Unterzeichnung der Vereinbarungen zwischen der DDR und der Syrischen Arabischen Republik in Damaskus,” (Damascus, June 5, 1967), in Bator and Bator, *Der DDR und die arabische Staaten*, 155.

contrast to West Germany's "anti-Arab policies," the GDR had been a "reliable friend of the Arab states," evident in its denunciation of "Israeli aggression" in 1967 and subsequent solidarity with the Arab states. Israel's "aggression" not only endangered peace and security in the Middle East but "in the most serious manner also endangers world peace."²¹ The notion that Israel endangered not just regional but "world" peace remained a constant theme of communist anti-Zionism.

Winzer accurately stated that "in the twenty years of its existence, the GDR had always supported the just cause of the Arab peoples. This [pro-Arab] stance forced the stable foundation for her [its] close friendship with the SAR [Syrian Arab Republic]." Moreover, he said, the GDR was the home of the "centuries old humanistic tradition of German-Arab friendship." The establishment of diplomatic relations would contribute to world peace and European security which was not possible without the recognition of the GDR.²² Winzer did not elaborate on which humanistic tradition he had in mind as the most recent forms of "German-Arab friendship" included Wilhemian Germany's efforts to foster jihad against Britain and France during World War I, and, more famously, Nazi Germany's cooperation with Haj Amin al-Husseini and Rashid al-Kilani during World War II and the Holocaust. Be that as it may, Winzer clearly articulated the connection between East German antagonism to Israel and support for the Arab states and the Palestinians at war with it, on the one hand, and the reasons for Arab willingness to antagonize West Germany and establish diplomatic relations with the GDR, on the other.

All of these statements were published in the pages of *Neues Deutschland*. Despite the remarkable importance that antagonism to "Zionism" and Israel had for what was one of the, if not the most important diplomatic development in the history of the regime, the topic of the *mélange* of anti-Zionism and its relationship to antisemitism has remained a marginal theme in the scholarship on the history of East Germany and, I also think, in the history of the Cold War. This lack of interest has not been due to inaccessible archives. Many

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

of the key documents, as those I have just cited, were on the front pages, or sometimes on the second or third pages of *Neues Deutschland*. Why did so many scholars, journalists, and politicians who showed great interest in remembering the murders of Europe's Jews manifest much less interest in a second German dictatorship that was helping states and organizations at war with the Jewish state? For the West German left, especially after 1967, these anti-Israeli sentiments emerged as a conventional wisdom evident in the terrorist organizations but also in the plethora of Marxist-Leninist organizations and the less orthodox successors to SDS in the 1970s. For today, suffice it to say that it became an important element of West German public life and exerted an enduring impact on left-wing and left-liberal politics and journalism. Far from antagonism of Israel being taboo, it was state policy in the GDR.

The files of the East German Ministry of National Defence are now in the German Federal Archive in Freiburg. The office files of Minister of Defence Heinz Hoffmann (1910–1985) are central to the history of the East German military alliance with the Arab states, first and foremost, Hafez al Assad's Syrian Baath dictatorship. Hoffmann joined the German Communist Party in 1930, fought in the Spanish Civil War, survived the Nazi years in the Soviet Union and returned to East Berlin in 1946 and worked with Ulbricht and Politburo Member Wilhelm Pieck. He studied at the General Staff Academy in the Soviet Union (1955–1957), became Deputy Minister of Defence in 1957 and Army Chief of Staff in 1958. He served as the GDR Minister of Defence from 1960 to 1985 and was one of the central figures in the military alliance between the GDR, the Arab states and the PLO. From 1973 until his death in 1985, he was a member of the SED Politburo, the most important decision making body in the GDR. The files of Hoffmann's office are essential for understanding the military dimensions of GDR alliance with Syria, the PLO and, at times, Egypt and Iraq.

I am not yet able to assess the extent of East German arms shipments compared with those coming from the Soviet Union or other Warsaw-Pact states. Klaus Storkmann's 2012 book, *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR und die "Dritte Welt"* as well as the remarkable declassified files of the Central Intelligence Agency in the CREST system at the US National Archives in College Park could help arriving at accurate figures on the role the GDR

played in the overall policy of the Soviet bloc.²³ Yet a memo from Hoffmann's office of fall 1969 indicates that the GDR was already in contact with the Egyptian Air Force and Navy and was repairing MiG-21 jets. In 1971, the GDR exports to Egypt included 29,000 machine pistols, 85,000 pairs of protective clothing, and 12 kits of repair parts for the MiG-21. The machine pistols and protective clothing were delivered with "special credit" arrangements between the GDR and Egypt while the other materials were paid with letters of credit.²⁴

Two years later in October 1971, Heinz Hoffmann led an East German military delegation on a trip to Iraq, Egypt, and most importantly to Hafez al-Assad's Syria. There he met with Assad as well as with the Chief of the Syrian General Staff, Mustafa Tlass. Tlass informed Hoffmann of his "unlimited admiration of fascist Blitzkrieg strategy and of the actual accomplishments of the bourgeois German military" ("die rückhaltlose Bewunderung der faschistischen Blitzkriegsstrategie und der sachlichen Leistungen der bürgerlichen deutschen Militärs").²⁵ He expressed Syria's interest in delivery of Warsaw-Pact tanks as well as MiG fighter jets. In an interview with Syrian journalists, Hoffmann said that the Syrians would "be victorious" in their "battle against the common enemy. We are fighting against a common enemy! The American imperialist support our enemies in Europe and give Israel money and weapons to protect their imperialist interests."²⁶ He continued:

²³ Klaus Storkmann, *Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR und die "Dritte Welt"* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2012). The CIA has declassified millions of files. They are available via searches that need to be conducted on computers at the US National Archives in College Park.

²⁴ "Arabische Republik Ägypten (ARÄ): Beziehungen der speziellen Außenwirtschaft zu den militärischen Organen der ARÄ," BAMA DVWI 115671, MfNV Sekr. d. Ministers. Unterlagen zur Vorbereitung d. Militärdelegation in den arabischen Staaten, pp. 37–38.

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Heinz Hoffman interview with Jaych-Ach-Chaab, (Damascus, October 1971), MfNV. Schriftverkehr des Ministers. Militärdelegation der DDR nach Syrien, Ägypten, Irak, BAMA DVW1/115673, p. 4. The German reads as follows: "Wir sind überzeugt, da Sie in Ihrem Kampf gegen den Feind siegen werden. Wir kämpfen gegen einen gemeinsamen Feind! Die amerikanischen Imperialisten unterstützen unsere Feinde in Europa und geben Israel Geld und Waffen, um ihre imperialistischen Interessen zu schützen."

In reality, both of our peoples are fighting together against the imperialist and Zionist forces. We in the GDR fight on our border against our enemy, the NATO countries. This enemy is the strongest partner of the American imperialists in Europe. The American imperialists always stand behind West Germany. In just the same way, you here fight against Israel, that is also a partner of the USA. Israel in fact is a bridge (*Brückenkopf*) for the imperialists in the Middle East. That is why the American imperialists support Israel and give Israel everything it needs (money, weapons) and thus it can play its imperialist role. Therefore I assert that we are conducting a common struggle against the imperialist and Zionist forces. Can we defeat this common enemy? Naturally we can, if we place all of our effort toward that end. Together with the help of our friends in the world we will finally defeat our common enemy because the fighting people will always win in the end. In your country, we are certain that the Arab peoples be victorious over their enemy so that he will have to pull his troops back from occupied Arab territories.²⁷

The relationship between the GDR and Syria and Hoffman and Tlass deepened in the next decade. At the end of his visit to Damascus in May 1983, Hoffmann raised a toast to the Syrians and to Tlass.²⁸ Following the familiar standard denunciations of Israel, imperialism and Zionism, Hoffmann extolled the Syrian and GDR friendship as well as “the community born of struggle (*Kampfgemeinschaft*) among soldiers of the Syrian armed forces and the National Peoples’ Army of the GDR, to the health of all members of the Syrian armed forces and to its Minister of Defense, comrade General Mustafa Tlass!”²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 5–6.

²⁸ Heinz Hoffmann, “Empfang in der Botschaft der DDR,” MfNV Sekr. d. Ministers. Militärdelegation der DDR nach Syrien, Ägypten, Irak., BAMA DVW1/115673.

²⁹ Ibid., 4 and 10.

The GDR and the PLO

In 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organization, whose charter called for a one-state solution that would eliminate the Jewish state and whose activity consisted of terrorist attacks on Israel, Western Europe, and on international civil aviation, opened an office in East Berlin. Over the next two decades, the relationship between the GDR and the PLO became central for both parties. For the GDR it was evidence of its global revolutionary commitments, and for the PLO it served as a source of weapons, economic aid, military training, and political and diplomatic support. In the years in which the PLO was engaged in armed attacks on Israeli civilians, Yasser Arafat's photo appeared frequently on the front page of *Neues Deutschland* literally embracing a smiling Erich Honecker, visiting the memorial to victims of fascism in East Berlin and sitting across the table from Honecker and other members of the East German Politburo. The East Germans worked closely with the Arab and Palestinian delegations at the United Nations to deflect criticisms about terrorism or human rights abuses in the Arab states and to redefine the meaning of words such as "terrorism."

Arafat visited East Berlin for the first time from October 30 to November 2, 1971 at the invitation of the GDR's Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (AASK).³⁰ In 1973 Arafat traveled to East Berlin for the second time and met with Politburo Member Herman Axen. In June, he had an official conversation with Gerhard Grüneberg who emerged over the following sixteen years as the key contact in the Politburo with the PLO. In August, Arafat was celebrated as a major attraction of the "World Youth Festival" in East Berlin. He then met Erich Honecker for the first of what would turn out to be many visits. East Germany was the first of the Communist states to open a PLO Consulate and did so a year before the Soviet Union did. The common "struggle against imperialism and Zionism" was incorporated into the 1973 agreement that accompanied the opening of the Consulate.³¹ Though Winzer denied that the agreement included military assistance

³⁰ Timm, *Hammer*, Zirkel, *Davidstern*, 269–75.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

and training, in fact the agreement signed by Arafat and Grüneberg on August 2, 1973 included the GDR's agreement "to support the Palestinian Liberation Organization with deliveries of equipment of a non-civilian nature." In the agreement between the SED and the PLO in 1975 for 1976/1977, the "GDR continues its solidarity and support for the Palestinian people and give the PLO solidarity materials (*Solidaritätsgüter*)" in civilian goods valued at five million marks and material form on the basis of "special," unspecified agreements.³² De facto, the GDR thus supported military actions against Israel, even when it distanced itself from terrorism. The public denunciation of individual terrorist acts went hand in hand with descriptions of PLO attacks on Israel as "armed liberation struggle" and thus not terrorism.³³

Shortly after the massacre of the Israeli wrestling team at the Munich Olympics by terrorists of the Black September organization on September 5, 1972, Arafat publicly denied that the PLO was involved. On September 17, 1972 Arafat wrote a long and interesting letter in the name of the PLO Executive Committee to Honecker about what he called "the action in Munich" and about what he considered Israeli aerial attacks on "Palestinian refugee camps" on September 8. He said that the PLO "was not responsible for the organization Black September" but did not directly say that he and the PLO had nothing to do with the attack. The absence of a firmer denial must have suggested to Honecker and his comrades that Arafat and the PLO leadership were somehow involved. In any case, Arafat did not criticize the attack in Munich. He was sending the note because "we [the Executive Committee of the PLO] approve, treasure, are proud of and take hope and strength from the sincere friendship for our cause and your sympathy that you have shown us as well as your recognition of our right in the struggle." He reminded Honecker that two days earlier the PLO issued an official statement that "it is not responsible for the Black September Organization," that is, the group which carried out the attack in

³² Gerhard Grüneberg and Yassir Arafat, "Verinbarung zwischen der Sozialistischen Einheitspartie Deutschlands und der Palästinensischen Befreiungsorganisationen (PLO) für die Jahre 1976/1977," [East] Berlin (December 1, 1975), Bundesarchiv Berlin SAPMO DY 30/ 9529, "Büro des Politbur des ZK der SED 1972-1989, 1-3.

³³ Ibid.

Munich. Arafat urged "understanding of the action in Munich from the viewpoint of the general problem and its historical events with all of their political, national and human dimensions. If one wants to really distinguish between the deep causes and the peripheral and secondary events, it is futile and useless to view the action apart from the stream of events and from their whole historical framework."³⁴

Arafat's appeal for understanding the Munich attack was a clear message to Honecker and the SED leadership that he viewed terrorism as a fully justified means of achieving his political ends. Not only did the letter not contain a hint of remorse over the murders of the Jewish athletes. It took Israel to task for "claiming" that an act of terrorism was, in fact, an act of terrorism, and was using the event to unleash a "war of annihilation" and a global campaign of murder against the Palestinians. With the receipt of this letter, Honecker and the SED leadership knew that Arafat justified terrorism directed against Israelis. This was a man with whom Honecker and the SED were in the process of developing a close and enduring bond that would last until the regime's fall in 1989.

On November 27, 1972, Honecker sent a public letter of greetings to the "Arab People's Conference in Support of the Palestinian Revolution" taking place in Beirut. The text, which had been composed a few days earlier in the Division of International Relations in the SED's Central Committee was printed in *Neues Deutschland* and distributed by the GDR's press agency.³⁵ In the name of the SED's Central Committee and "of the whole people" of the GDR, he sent "warm greetings" to the conference which was an expression of "strengthening of the unity and determination of broad strata of the Arab peo-

³⁴ Yassir Arafat to Erich Honecker, September 17, 1972, "Notzen und Schreiben außen politischen Charakters zwischen der DDR und der Palästinen-sischen Befreiungsbewegung zur Unterstützung der PLO durch die DDR, 1972, 1974, 1978–1979," PAAA, MFAA, Abt. Naher-und Mittlerer Osten, MfAA, C 7.667 (ZR 2040/01), p. 48–49.

³⁵ Abteilung Internationale Verbindungen, "Entwurf eines Grußschreibens : An die arabische Volkskonferenz zur Unterstützung der palästinen-sischen Revolution," Berlin (November 24, 1972), 1–2. Also see "Kongreß zur Unterstützung des palastinensischen Volkes eröffnet: Delegation der DDR überbrachte Grüße des ZK der SED," *Neues Deutschland* (November 28, 1972), BAB ZK der SED, DY 30 9529, p. 1.

ples in the struggle against imperialism, Zionism, and reaction.” While Honecker did not mention the Munich massacre, he did assert that what he called “the string of recent Israeli acts of aggression against the Republic of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic demonstrate yet again that Israel, with the support of the US and other imperialist states is not ready to agree to a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict.”³⁶ Honecker condemned “the efforts of imperialism and all reactionary forces to rob the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and engaged in reactionary conspiracies to split and attack the Palestinian liberation movement.” The “history of the world-wide confrontation with imperialism” had shown that the unity of the “anti-imperialist front” led by the Soviet Union and the “socialist community of states” lay behind “every success in the struggle for self-determination and social progress.” The GDR, “in the future as in the past,” stood “firmly on the side of the Arabic-Palestinian people, its resistance movement” and supported its right to self-determination.³⁷

The GDR’s Intelligence Cooperation with the PLO and its Eurocentric Definition of Counterterrorism

In June 1979, Erich Mielke, the director of the Stasi signed an agreement of cooperation with Abu Ayad, the head of the counterpart institutions of the PLO intelligence service. In August, Mielke and Ayad further agreed that a representative of the PLO intelligence service would be sent to work in East Berlin.³⁸ From then until the collapse of the regime in 1989, Ayad or his second in command Amin al-Hindi met several times a year with Mielke or with Gerhard Neiber, the director of the Ministry of State Security’s (MfS) Division XXII, the office for *Terror Bekämpfung* which is roughly translated as “Fighting terrorism” or more colloquially as “Counterterrorism.” The agreement called

³⁶ Ibid., 1–2.

³⁷ Ibid., 2.

³⁸ Gerhard Neiber, “Vorlage zum Einsatz eine Vertreters der Vereinigen PLO-Sicherheit in der DDR,” Berlin (1980), BStU, Archiv der Zentralstelle, Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS) Hauptverwaltung (HA) XXII, Nr. 17508, p. 67–69.

for “operative Zusammenwirkens” or “operational cooperation” in the GDR. Not long after the 1979 agreement, on July 15, 1980, Abu Ayad met with officials in Division XXII to discuss “terrorist forces and their activities.”³⁹ Before offering a detailed assessment of various terrorist organizations (the memo is twenty pages long), Ayad explained the meaning of some important terms. His comments were striking in their candor. The PLO, he said, distinguished between “right-wing terrorism,” “left-wing adventurers,” and “terrorist forces that are active in the interest of the Palestinian resistance movement.” While it rejected both “right-wing terrorists” and “left-wing adventurers,” the “PLO supported the other terrorist forces and at times worked together with them.” (*unterstütze die PLO die anderen terroristischen Kräfte, bzw. arbeite teilweise mit ihnen zusammen*).⁴⁰ Ayad’s discussion with the MfS officials was striking for its absence of euphemism. He did not refer to “anti-imperialist resistance fighters” or say that “one’s man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Instead, he understood terrorism to be the intentional targeting of civilians, and that it was distinct from acts of war carried out against military forces. While in public both the PLO and the GDR as well as the Soviet bloc states in general denounced Western attacks on “international terrorism” as imperialist propaganda, when speaking frankly to one another, officials understood the nature of terrorism and were equally frank about supporting it.

The MfS officials, probably Neiber and perhaps Mielke as well, replied that they “could support a certain toleration of left-oriented terrorist forces so long as it preserves strict secrecy, obedience to [East German] law, and it precludes any kind of political or any other kind of damage for the GDR and its allies.” Ayad assured his counterparts that the PLO agreed with the MfS on this matter. He suggested that agreement about these issues was a basis on which “the exchange of information could be further improved.” Ayad then offered “details about terrorist groups and forces to which the PLO had contacts and

³⁹ “Bericht über das Gespräch mit dem Leiter der ‘Vereinigten PLO-Sicherheit’—ABU AYAD—am 15.7.1980 mit terroristischen Kräften und ihren Aktivitäten,” [East] Berlin (June 18, 1980), BStU ZA HA XXII, Nr. 17508, p. 304–23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

connections.”⁴¹ The groups in question included the Carlos group, Abu Nidal, Saddam Hussein, former members of the Wadi Haddad group, the Armenian Liberation Front, and the Japanese Red Army. Regarding “terrorist groups in the FRG” (Federal Republic of Germany or West Germany), Ayad said that the PLO had no contact with the June 2 Movement or the Red Army Faction. It had developed contacts to the Revolutionary Cells, the group that participated in the hijacking of an Air France flight to Entebbe, Uganda in 1976. In 1981, Ayad told the MfS officials that the PLO was, in fact, working with the Revolutionary Cells and “intended to expand the connections to the so-called ‘Revolutionary Cells’ in the Federal Republic and eventually to use it to carry out particular armed actions.” Ayad offered to give the names of members of “these terrorist organizations” in West Germany to the MfS. The Ministry officials suggested that he give them the names before the PLO established close connections to them so the Stasi could examine them first. “Abu Ayad accepted the offer with gratitude.”⁴²

These are the kinds of conversations that only take place among close, trusting, and firm political allies who are involved in a very special relationship and alliance of great importance. The goals of the cooperation included intelligence about and measures to prevent “subversive plans and intentions” that would endanger the state and security of the GDR; intelligence about “terrorist and extremist forces” active in West Germany and West Berlin that could negatively affect the GDR; “creation of positions and possibilities of influence among Palestinian citizens for fulfilling the operational tasks of the MfS,” that is, seeking agents among Palestinians for the Stasi; and influencing “Palestinians, Arabs and other foreigners working for them to obey the laws and state regulations of the GDR (passports and visa rules, customs and currency regulations, registration orders, drug laws).”⁴³ This last goal concerned the efforts of the Stasi to keep track of Palestinian, Arab and West European terrorists who lived in or traveled to and from East Germany. The official, whose name is blacked out in the Stasi files, would be given press credentials of the “WAFA,” the Palestinian news agency as a cover and would have ongoing contact with

⁴¹ Ibid., 305.

⁴² Ibid., 319.

⁴³ Ibid., 68.

Division XXII led by Neiber. The East German government would cover expenses for an apartment and office in East Berlin.

The Stasi had no objections to Palestinian terror attacks on Israel. Its concern was to prevent Arab and Palestinian terrorists from using East German territory to launch attacks in West Germany and Western Europe. On January 3, 1983, for example, MfS officers asked Abu Ayad a series of very detailed questions about the aftereffects of the “Israeli aggression,” that is, Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Were there splinter organizations that placed “armed struggle” at the center of their activities? “In what form and extent would armed actions be conducted outside the Arab region, especially in Western Europe?” Would “territories or citizens of the socialist states be involved in such actions?” What did he know about “terrorist groups and forces” in the aftermath of the Lebanon war and “to which ones did the PLO have connections?” The questions indicate that the MfS was familiar with groups named Abu Nidal, Carlo, Abu Mohammed, Abu Ibrahim, and Carlos as well. What were their plans? Did they intend to establish bases in East Germany and engage in terrorist activities in Western Europe? Mielke, Neiber, and their staff made clear that there should be no terrorist bases in the GDR. “Our experiences in recent years confirm that difficulties are to be expected due to lack of discipline, violation of agreements among individual functionaries of the PLO.”⁴⁴

The emerging policy in the 1970s was what could be referred to as East Germany’s Eurocentric counterterrorism policy, that is, support for terrorism waged against Israel but opposition to terrorist attacks waged against West Germany and Western Europe. That said, the links between the MfS and the Red Army Faction in West Germany were important. For example, the East German government gave members of the RAF who had fled from West German authorities new names, apartments, and employment, and thus protected them from arrest by West German authorities.⁴⁵ The Stasi kept a close eye on them and

⁴⁴ Abteilung XXII, “Konzeption für die Gespräche mit dem Leiter der ‘Vereinigten PLO-Sicherheit’ Abu Ayadafut Linie XXII,” [East] Berlin (January 3, 1983), BStU ZA HA XXII, Nr. 17508, pp. 178–81.

⁴⁵ Martin Jander, “Differenzen im antiimperialistischen Kampf: Zu den Verbindungen des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit mit der RAF und dem bundesdeutschen Linksterrorismus,” in *Die RAF und der link Terrorismus*, ed. by Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 712.

on Arabs and Palestinians living in East Germany who might use the GDR as a base to launch terrorist attacks on West Germany and Western Europe. Such attacks could be traced back to the GDR and destroy support in West Germany and Western Europe for the lucrative financial support coming to East Germany from West Germany under the terms of détente. In short, the Stasi officials knew very well that “international terrorists,” that is, radical Arabs and Palestinians, as well as their West German and West European collaborators were flying into East Berlin from the Middle East with false passports and then traveling to West Berlin where they were carrying out terrorist attacks. As the Western intelligence services knew this as well, the problem facing the East German regime was obvious: how could it claim to be an advocate of peace, détente, and better relations with the West—thus bringing large cash donations from the West German government—if it was tolerating and, who knows, perhaps assisting, terrorist groups waging attacks in West Germany and Western Europe? How, in other words, could it avoid confirming Western suspicions that it was a state sponsor of international terrorism? So, the Stasi, which was aiding the PLO as well as the terrorist groups on its left wing, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, in carrying out terrorist attacks against Israel and perhaps elsewhere in the world also worked with the PLO to prevent those same organizations from carrying out terrorist attacks in West Germany and Western Europe, attacks that could be traced to the GDR, the Soviet Union, and other communist regimes in Eastern Europe. This combination of support for terrorism waged against Israel but opposition to terrorism waged in Western Europe if based in the Soviet bloc became the meaning of the term “counter-terrorism” (*Terrorismusbekämpfung*) assigned to Division XXII and was central to the Eurocentric meaning and the hypocrisies of East German counterterrorism policy.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Given the clandestine nature of all terrorist activity and the fact that there was considerable destruction of documents in the files of the Ministry of State Security during the collapse of the East German regime in November 1989, active support by the Stasi of West German terrorism cannot be ruled out. What is clear is that the stated policy of the Stasi as expressed in important official memos opposed such terrorist attacks due to the damage they would do to East German and Soviet bloc interests. For a more detailed account, see Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, chapters 8 and 11.

Weapons Deliveries

Establishing the amount and kinds of weapons that the East German regime delivered to the Arab states at war with Israel, to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and to splinter groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which engaged in airplane hijacking, bombings, and assassinations in the Middle East and in Western Europe is a task for ongoing research. Public assertions remained at the level of generalities about solidarity with anti-imperialist forces. In the fall of 1989, significant amounts of document destruction took place within the offices of the Ministry of State Security and probably within those of the Defense Ministry as well. Surviving files indicated weapons shipments to other states, such as Yemen, which may have included shipments to the PLO and its member organizations. With these qualifications in mind, however, significant evidence about the directly military nature of the alliance between the GDR, the Arab states, and the PLO has survived in the archives of both the MfS and the NVA (the National People's Army). The evidence in the Stasi's Division of Weapons and Chemical Services (*BCD, Bewaffnung und Chemische Dienst*) includes receipts and records of weapons deliveries and records of military training to officers of the PLO, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in military training institutes in East Germany. They were colleagues with officers from Angola, Vietnam, the Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Laos, Libya, Nicaragua, Mozambique, and Zanzibar. There may also be evidence about East German assistance to Syria in constructing an arsenal of chemical weapons. The evidence in the Defense Ministry files details shipments both to the PLO but also to Arab states, first and foremost, Syria in the 1970s and 1980s. As we will see, the weapons sent to the PLO were those most useful for terrorism and guerilla war.

Given the secrecy that surrounded the East German weapons programs, it is possible that additional arms shipments were recorded in files under code names or were referred to in files that were destroyed as the regime was collapsing in the fall of 1989. Weapons in East Germany's "Operation Friendship" program were sent to many armed leftist movements in the third world, especially to Yemen, where Palestinian terror organizations had bases. Weapons shipped to those other

destinations may have found their way into the arsenals of Al Fatah, the PFLP, PDFLP, and other Palestinian armed organizations. Most of the larger weapons systems such as tanks, MiG fighter jets, Katuysha rocket launchers, and artillery that East Germany shipped to the armed forces of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya were produced in the Soviet Union. Following the Politburo's decision of 1969 to expand military support to states and movements around the world, however, East Germany began to manufacture its own version of the Kalashnikov assault weapon, hand grenades, cartridges, and land mines

The following is a summary of the information in the currently available East German archives of the total amount and kinds of weapons that East Germany sold or gave as "solidarity" goods free of charge to the Arab states and the Palestinian armed organizations at war with Israel from 1967 to 1989: 750,000 Kalashnikov assault weapons; 120 MiG Fighter jets; 180,000 antipersonnel land mines; 235,000 grenades; 25,000 rocket propelled grenade (RPG) launchers; and 25 million cartridges of various sizes. In addition, during these years, East German technicians repaired and serviced 350 MiG fighter jets for the air forces of Iraq and Syria. From 1972 to 1989, more than 3,000 military personnel received training in East German military institutes, including several hundred from Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the PLO. A long list of other equipment with military purposes included binoculars, tents, parachutes, radio, field hospitals, equipment for chemical warfare, sniper rifles, carbines, fuses, and explosives.⁴⁷ While Soviet armed forces fought in battle against Israel, I have not found evidence that East Germans did so.

Conclusion

Hatred of Israel and the willingness to support its armed enemies was not a peculiarity of East German communism. Antagonism, efforts to delegitimize its existence, and ideological rejection of Zionism was rather the norm among communist governments and parties everywhere in the world after the antic cosmopolitan purges of 1949 to 1953. East Germany was not exceptional in associating Zionism with rac-

⁴⁷ Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, 453.

ism and imperialism. After the purges, it was impossible anywhere to remain a communist and simultaneously support the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. It was Marxism-Leninism, not the aftereffects of Nazism, that inspired the communist attack on Israel. The most important source of weapons was the Soviet Union, though small East Germany made remarkable contributions. East Germany's enthusiastic participation in this effort was an example of the unity of Marxist-Leninist theory with political practice. The shipment of weapons to Syria and weapons training for the PLO was the logical consequence of a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of global politics and of the place of Israel in the world system.

Yet it was only in Germany after the Nazis that the antagonism to Israel smashed the implicit and unspoken eleventh commandment followed by the West German government to do no more harm to the Jews. It was only in Germany that turning against Israel came with the supposed benefit of liberation from the burdens of German history after the Holocaust, what the West Berlin leader of the June 2nd Movement, Dieter Kunzelmann derisively called "the Jewish complex."⁴⁸ The eagerness with which East German communists and West German leftists called the Israelis Nazis suggested that a different kind of relief and liberation was at work, one in which these Germans thought of themselves as the "good Germans" whose goodness lay in attacking the Jewish state, in finding common ground with its Arab and Palestinian Arab enemies, thus oddly achieving freedom from the burdens of German history after Nazism.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, anti-Zionism was correctly associated with the ideology and policies of the Nazi regime.⁴⁹ Part of the historical importance of the communist turn against Zionism and Israel during the Cold War was to lend the global prestige of leftist antifascism to the association of Zionism and Israel with racism and imperialism. That was a connection that neither neo-Nazis nor their collaborators among Islamists could have spread as an element of leftist politics around the world. In that sense, they both contributed greatly to the persistence of an antisemitism of conse-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹ On Nazi anti-Zionism, see Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

quences, and at times of intentions that persist to our own time. In the era of undeclared wars and terrorism aimed at Israel, the East German reversal of the meaning of antifascism led to a bizarre outcome: a self-described antifascist regime in East Berlin denounced the leaders of the Jewish state as Nazis. The East German communists indignantly rejected any suggestion that their willingness to believe the worst about Israel and to impute murderous and even genocidal aims to its leaders had anything to do with 1900 years of European anti-Judaism and its repeated associations of the Jews with violence and murder.⁵⁰ The more they insisted that anti-Zionism had nothing to do with hatred of Jews or Judaism, the less they reflected on the fact that they were participating in an effort to bring yet more misery, death, and destruction to the Jews living in Israel.

⁵⁰ On this, see David Nirenberg's important synthesis, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

ADEED DAWISHA

*The Pathology of Arab Dictatorship:
Memories of Saddam Hussein*

The execution of Saddam Hussein on December 30, 2006 closed the chapter on one of the most barbarous episodes in contemporary world history. During his thirty-five-year rule, the “butcher of Baghdad” waged wars that cost the lives of over a million people. Another half a million or so of his own citizens died at the hands of his ferocious and pitiless security machines. Iraqis, accused of the most innocuous of transgressions—a silly and harmless joke about governmental management, a statement betraying a lack of unconditional loyalty to the president, a slip of the tongue unhappily made in the presence of one of the hundreds of thousands of the regime’s secret agents—would find themselves thrown in prisons without any due process and subjected to all kinds of mental and physical abuse. In the last two decades of Saddam’s rule, Iraq provided the bizarre spectacle of a country of some thirty million inhabitants being completely intimidated and cowered into submission by a small minority, held together by fierce family, clan, and tribal loyalties, which controlled the state’s institutions of violence.

But to say that it was coercion, and coercion alone, that explained the persistence of Saddam Hussein’s rule over three and a half decades is not just imprecise, it is patently incorrect. As in much of historical and political science analyses, Saddam’s rule cannot be explained by reference to one single factor. While inflicting pain on human beings did not seem to faze him very much, and was indeed a pillar upon which his rule was built, other factors also played contributing roles in his emergence onto the political scene, in his ability to consolidate

political power, and in his eventual total dominance of the country's politics and its society.

In the first place, Saddam's dictatorship was hardly an aberrant phenomenon in Middle Eastern politics. It was born and was to grow in a regional political milieu that was shaped by nationalist ideology which was at best indifferent to the notion of individual freedom. Secondly, focusing on the collectivist, rather than individual good, Saddam used the country's substantial wealth in enacting a multitude of social policies that won him much kudos among all segments of Iraqi society. As long as they were the beneficiaries of the country's palpable economic progress, Iraqis were more than willing to turn a blind eye to the growing dictatorial proclivities and practices of their young leader. Thirdly, the characteristics of this emerging relationship between leader and populace would be buttressed by the creation and consolidation of a personality cult embarked upon by Saddam's eager and determined agents of cultural production. To understand not just the dreams, but the realization, of total power in the case of Saddam Hussein, it behooves the analyst to place the admittedly indispensable element of violence within a much broader context in which history, ideology, and the purposeful and meritorious policies and actions of the state have similarly important functions.

Nationalism's Authoritarian Impulse

Saddam Hussein was a leading figure in Iraq's Baath Party which came to power through a successful military coup in July 1968. Arab nationalism was the political ideology that the Baath Party and Saddam Hussein proudly espoused and advocated. Singing the praises of Arab nationalism did not come as a surprise to the Iraqis; it fit in perfectly with the political and ideological dispositions not just of Iraqis, but of peoples throughout Arab lands. Nationalism had been the dominant ideology in the Arab world since it constituted a pivotal element in the anticolonialist struggles waged by Arabs and other third-world peoples in the twentieth century. The 1950s and 1960s represented the apex of the Arab nationalist tide, where peoples from different Arab states, who would not have known or communicated with each other, felt themselves belonging to one fraternity, spiritually tied

to one another, fighting together for one cause.¹ This indeed was the nationalist generation, of which the young Saddam Hussein, by now a committed adherent to the nationalist principals of the Baath party, was a proud member.

The problem was that the beliefs espoused by the nationalist generation were at best oblivious, and at worst hostile, to the idea of freedom. The vision of politics espoused by the young nationalists of the 1950s and 1960s trivialized democratic institutions. Any suggestion about the role of democracy, the possibility of a freely elected parliament, prospects for the formation of political parties, or decoupling the media from governmental control, would be dismissed out of hand as irrelevant, even inappropriate to the needs and concerns of the times.

Such a cavalier disposition to the idea of democracy is not surprising. After all, Arab nationalism reflected the ideas of nineteenth-century German cultural nationalism. Faced with over two thousand German-speaking states at the end of the eighteenth century, German nationalist thinkers focused obsessively on unifying the German nation. This became a supreme goal and a sacred act, which necessitated subsuming individual needs and rights into the national will. Notions of liberty or freedom were distractions, and when they contradicted the national will, they had to be repressed. It is in reference to this dictum that the eminent German historian Heinrich von Treitschke would justify the annexation in 1871 of the German-speaking population of Alsace, the majority of whom wanted to remain politically within France. "We desire," Treitschke says in a chilling tone, "even against their will, to restore them to themselves."²

This was the intellectual legacy upon which the ideas of Arab nationalism were developed. Arab nationalists would advocate the forcible amalgamation of the Arab nation, and its defense against foreign and domestic enemies, but they would have little to say about individual liberty and personal freedom, except for their complete subordination to the national will. Sati' al-Husri, who through his voluminous writings was considered the foremost theoretician of

¹ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

² Hans Kohn, *The Ideas of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 582.

Arab nationalism, would argue unhesitatingly that if need be individual freedoms should be sacrificed at the altar of nationalist goals and ambitions.³ Such were the antidemocratic theoretical tenets of Arab nationalism.

Beyond the realm of theory, there apparently were practical reasons for discounting democracy. The nationalist generation saw Arab nationalism as the vehicle by which a distinguished future would be built upon the foundation of a glorious past, when Arabs were the custodians of a luminous civilization at a time when the West languished in the darkness of the medieval ages. But that was easier said than done. The task ahead was fraught with untold difficulties and obstacles. In the 1950s and 1960s, foreign powers still occupied parts of the Arab world; the British were in control of the Gulf states and Aden, and the French were fighting a dirty war in Algeria. There were also the political divisions within the Arab world, artificially created by the outsiders, so nationalists believed, but gaining legitimacy with the passage of time. And then there were the many communal schisms that permeated the Arab world: the scourge of tribalism in broad swaths of Arab lands which was compounded by ethno-sectarian divides—Moslems and Christians in Lebanon, Alawites and Sunnis in Syria, Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq and in the Gulf, Arabs and Africans in Sudan, and Arabs and Berbers in North Africa.

This was indeed a titanic struggle, and the nationalists—cognizant of these entrenched and grueling challenges, which they fervently believed to have been perpetuated by the perfidious colonialists and imperialists—naturally had little patience for democracy and its cumbersome institutions. What need was there to listen to an opposing point of view, to argue a contrary perspective? Would it not be a distraction, a diversion from the course of the revolutionary struggle? Were all Arabs not united in their one sacred endeavor to achieve radical reforms of their societies, and to fight Western domination? How could there be a contrary position to that? In those heady days of radical nationalism, of confronting Western powers and rubbing their noses into the blistering Arab sand, the nationalist generation did not

³ Abu Khaldun Sati al-Husri, *Safahat min al- Madhi al- Qarib* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wuhda al-Arabiya, 1984), 42.

have much patience for democracy's fondness of debate; they believed in the necessity of the centralization of power.

What sealed the fate of democracy was that the popular antipathy to the West and its perceived imperial ambitions in the area translated into hostility not only towards the policies of the West, but also towards its institutions. Prior to the revolutionary era, a number of pro-Western Arab countries had adopted parliamentary systems modeled on Britain and France. Admittedly, theirs fell far short of the standards of Western liberal democracies. But, when all was said and done, these systems were still more open and civil than those subsequently instituted by the nationalists. Their Achilles heel was their association with the West at a historical juncture when the West represented everything that was evil. In light of this instinctive emotional allergy, it is hardly surprising that the nationalist generation feared Western democratic institutions as instruments of maintaining Western hegemony.

In Western societies, competitive political parties are accepted as essential elements of functioning democracies. But this view was hardly shared by the nationalist generation. It was not just that the nationalists of the era would simply dismiss political parties as irrelevant; they were intent on delegitimizing the very concept itself. For instance, one of the favorite slogans shouted by rioters and demonstrators in celebrations of the demise of the pro-Western Iraqi monarchy in 1958 was *al-qawmiya al-Arabiya tufny al-ahzab al-gharbiya* (Arab nationalism exterminates western political parties).⁴ Political parties were seen as pernicious; they would do the bidding of the imperialists, become a fifth column for greedy outside powers, and sow divisions in Arab ranks, undermining the nationalist march.

And it was in such a political environment that Saddam Hussein would attain his political maturation. In the late 1950s, when he was still a teenager, he joined the aggressively nationalist Baath Party, and soon became active in all its clandestine conspiracies. In 1959, he, along with other members of the party, participated in the botched assassination of the then anti-Baathist ruler of Iraq. Again, party ideas and activities provided the milieu in which Saddam's dictatorial proclivities and his penchant for violence were nurtured. The Baath Party

⁴ See Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 305.

modeled itself on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union advocating “democratic centralism,” which in effect institutionalized the supremacy of the ruling party. No public or private space would be allowed outside the party’s jurisdiction and control. Moreover, the Baath advocated violence as a legitimate, and indeed the preferable, path to gaining power. Michel Aflaq, the party’s founder and philosopher, was not coy about identifying “cruelty” as a reliable method of forcing Baathism on people. “When we are cruel to others,” Aflaq would write, “we know that our cruelty would bring them back to their true selves, of which they are ignorant.”⁵ Baathist advocacy of dictatorial rule, and its glorification of violence, added to nationalism’s indifference to individual liberty, provided a critical learning experience for the future dictator of Iraq.

“Violence” and “Merit” in Saddam’s Rise to Power

On the morning of July 17, 1968 Iraqis woke up to martial music announcing a military coup under the leadership of the Baath Party. The coup was led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, a retired military officer and seasoned conspirator. In retirement he had become the Secretary-General of the Regional Command of the clandestine Baath Party, and had begun plotting to grab political power. At Bakr’s side was the ferociously ambitious Saddam Hussein, who at the age of thirty-three was second only to Bakr in the Party’s power hierarchy.

While Saddam did not assume the presidency of Iraq until July 1979, and while in the years after the 1968 coup he would publicly defer to President Bakr and would appear prepared to consult with other senior members of the party, in reality from the very beginning of the Baathist era he behaved and was perceived as the surest bet for appropriating political power. An adroit political manipulator and determined street fighter, Saddam was never concerned about getting his hands dirty with the blood of those he considered a danger to the party generally, but mainly to himself.

The membership of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the highest executive and legislative body suggested a collective lead-

⁵ Michel Aflaq, *Fi Sabil al-Baath* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliah, 1963), 161–62.

ership of senior and powerful party members. Saddam, however, had worked hard to win the confidence and affections of Bakr, whom Saddam would publicly refer to as *al-Abb al-Qa'id* (the father leader). The fact that they both originated from the town of Takrit in the midst of Iraq's Sunni heartland only cemented the bond of trust and mutual reliance that existed between the elderly military man and his young civilian deputy. Bakr thus would rarely contradict and clash with Hussein. Since between the two of them, they occupied the two most powerful positions in the RCC, the Cabinet and the Regional (Iraqi) Command of the Baath Party, Hussein was able to consistently push his preferences through.

Less than two years after the coup, as Iraq entered the 1970s, Hussein was well on the way to becoming the country's primary political personality. As an admirer of Joseph Stalin,⁶ Hussein well realized the value of the infamous 1930s purges to the longevity of the Soviet dictator's absolutist rule. Matching Stalin's ruthlessness and manipulative acumen, he spent the first two years consolidating his hold on power by promoting to positions of influence in the party and the security organizations men who were loyal to him personally, and eliminating potential rivals by uncovering real and imagined plots against the government.

Hussein's first concern was with taming the military. He followed a two-pronged policy. He would ensure that officers were well provided for materially. Salaries of all levels of the armed forces were raised, and officers would consistently receive preferential treatment, such as priority listing for house and car purchases. During the Iraq-Iran war, western reporters were always surprised by the frontline quarters for officers, which were lavishly equipped with beds, television sets, video machines, carpets, and had direct telephone lines to Iraqi cities.⁷ Such inducements were meant to make the officers' well-being dependent

⁶ Ayad 'Allawi, Iraq's prime minister from June 2004 to April 2005, told me in early 1978, shortly before he was attacked by an assassin wielding an axe in his home in England, that once in the early 1970s he had met with Saddam Hussein, and during the course of a cordial conversation, Saddam had expressed his admiration for Stalin's use of the "psychology of mass coercion," which the then vice president thought was the only viable policy for a fractious country like Iraq.

⁷ *The Guardian*, May 14, 1981.

on Hussein's munificence. Alongside the generosity, Hussein was ruthless in his crusade to ensure the subservience of the defense establishment to the civilians in the political leadership. By 1971, army generals, who were perceived by Hussein as potential rivals, had been removed from power, many of them killed in murky circumstances, along with their supporters in the armed forces. The Intelligence Services and mushrooming secret police, by now controlled almost exclusively by Hussein's loyalists, had made a point of infiltrating the ranks of the military, and was given free rein to imprison, torture and assassinate. Hussein then amalgamated the mostly civilian membership of the Party's Regional Command into the RCC, thus bringing the latter institution, the highest policy-making body in the land, under the control of civilians.

In this context, civilians were by no means spared. As conspiracy after conspiracy, some real, others imagined or manufactured, was unearthed, imprisonment and executions claimed their share of civilian lives as well as military officers.⁸ In the first decade of the Baathist regime, Hussein, while legally the number two man in the Party and governmental structures, was in fact consolidating power around himself, methodically cleansing party, administrative, and security institutions of competitors and their supporters. By the second half of the 1970s, Saddam was secure in the knowledge that civilian leaders, who were popular and influential among the Party's rank and file, had been eliminated. Thus, while it is true that only in July 1979, after easing out Bakr, would Hussein rise to the summit of the political edifice, in the actual constellation of power, he had been the top dog long before that.

It would be a mistake, however, to characterize Saddam's rise to power in the 1970s as dependent entirely on naked coercion. The rising strongman of Iraq also recognized the value of merit and achievement, of getting things done and delivering the goods, in cementing his political control. He knew well that authoritarian leaders can push through much needed reforms with a speed and decisiveness that simply cannot be matched by democratic leaders, encumbered as they are by the diffusion of power and responsibilities among various, constitutionally separated and balancing, institutions. And there can be little

⁸ Salam 'Aboud, *Thaqafat al-'unf fi al-'Iraq* (Cologne: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2002), 138–39.

doubt that substantial socio-economic reforms and improvements took place in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Much of this occurred in the days of plenty that were sandwiched between 1974 after the dramatic hike in oil prices and the early 1980s before Iraq's economy would come to a grinding halt as a result of the war with Iran.

Personally involved in directing socio-economic changes, almost micromanaging reforms, Saddam was determined to put the dramatic increase in oil income, which jumped tenfold between 1972 and 1974, to constructive use. Eschewing the practice of the Gulf kings and princes of building palaces and purchasing large private jets (excesses to which the Iraqi leader himself would fall prey later on), in the 1970s, Saddam embarked on an ambitious development plan that brought unparalleled prosperity to Iraq by the end of the decade. The GDP per capita literally took off from \$382 in 1972 to \$2726 in 1979.⁹ While Saddam continued to mouth Baathist socialist slogans, he encouraged private enterprise by incentivizing market forces and expanding the share of the free market in the state's economy. By the end of the decade Iraq's middle class had grown considerably and become manifestly more affluent. A revealing statistic is the number of privately owned cars in the country which rose from 67,400 in 1970 to 170,100 in 1978.¹⁰ This could not but bolster the regime's stability, since a content middle class would be less likely to undermine a political order from which it benefited.

At the same time, Saddam's development plans were instituted with an eye toward reducing the gap between rich and poor.¹¹ He thus intro-

⁹ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 232. The figures in the Sluglett book are in Iraqi dinars. I have changed them to dollars using the average 3.3 exchange rate, which can be found in the annual publication *The Middle East and North Africa, 1976–1977* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1976), 386.

¹⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Statistical Abstract* (1982), 959.

¹¹ See among others, Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, second edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 166–68; Adeed Dawisha, "Iraq: The West's Opportunity," *Foreign Policy* no. 41 (Winter 1980–1981): 142–43; Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A political Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 90–91; Saïd K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 109–11.

duced a variety of governmental initiatives aimed at the poor classes, including a substantial building program of modern dwellings for the poor, free education right through university level, and an expansion of free hospitals, clinics, and other medical facilities. Saddam also enacted legislation on social security, minimum wages and pension rights, as well as building electrical grids and generators so that electricity could be extended to remote villages, to people who had hardly seen a light bulb, let alone a refrigerator or television set. Beyond the "social justice" aspect which Saddam and the Baath preached, there was a palpable political benefit in these extensive reforms in that they significantly expanded Saddam's support base, as the largest beneficiaries were the Shiites of the south, traditionally the poorest and most socially-disadvantaged of Iraq's myriad communal groups.

Education was a major priority for Saddam Hussein in this period. Motivated by a modernist outlook and a desire to elevate himself above other leaders of Arab countries, Saddam poured significant resources into education and culture. Between 1973 and 1980, student enrollment in secondary schools rose from 600,000 to almost a million, and at universities it almost doubled from 49 to 96 thousand. In the same seven-year period, the number of university teachers increased from 1,721 to 6,515.¹² Thousands of Iraqi university graduates, armed with generous government scholarships, were arriving in West and East European capitals and cities in search of higher degrees. In all this, women were primary beneficiaries. They made impressive strides, particularly in educational attainment and participation in the work force. By 1980, women constituted 70 per cent of all pharmacists, almost half of all teachers and dentists, and just under a third of all physicians.¹³ In 1978, Saddam launched a five-year campaign to eradicate illiteracy within three years,¹⁴ and while this ambitious goal was never achieved, by the end of 1980, about two million Iraqis between the ages of fifteen and forty-five had been taught rudimentary reading and

¹² These figures are taken from Table A.4 in Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 312.

¹³ Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Updated paperback edition, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1989), 88.

¹⁴ Saddam Hussein, *al-'Iraq wa al-Siyasa al-Duwaliya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Huriya li al-Tiba'a, 1981), 196.

writing. Since much of the impetus behind the program was to add to Saddam's stature, the state propaganda agencies made sure that international organizations were well aware of Iraq's Herculean efforts. UNESCO duly obliged by awarding Iraq a prestigious international prize in the field.

There can be little doubt that all these momentous policies and reforms were Saddam's own initiatives and were applied and realized under his personal direction and supervision. No other institution challenged or debated these policies or the strategies behind them, and those tasked with implementing them, went about their work diligently and incorruptibly (somewhat of a rarity in the Arab world) for fear of the wrath of the all-powerful man at the helm. The fact that Iraq was able to achieve so much in such a short time was in no small measure attributed to the absolute control and uncontested power of the centralized policy-making institution.

“Violence” and “Personality Cult” in Saddam's Consolidation of Dictatorial Power

It would not be long before this combination of coercive and meritorious rule would net Saddam Hussein the ultimate prize that he had diligently, shrewdly, and ruthlessly pursued since the Baath Party's usurpation of power in summer 1968. In July 1979, Iraq's Vice President would finally become the country's president. Hussein's ascendancy to the presidency was in effect the formal realization of his already established predominance over the governmental structure and the decision-making process. But in a preview of the kind of rule he would soon impose on Iraq, the changeover would be accompanied by the obligatory violence, when in one murderous stroke he would set the tenor of his dominion, daring anyone to challenge, or even question his supreme power.

The blood-soaked drama began to unfold innocuously enough on July 16, 1979, when President Bakr appeared on television, looking weary, almost sickly, to announce his resignation, and to entrust the ship of state to Saddam Hussein, “the brave and faithful struggler who enjoyed the respect and trust of the party's strugglers..., the brilliant leader who was able to confront all the difficulties and shoulder all the

responsibilities.”¹⁵ Whether Bakr resigned willingly or was pushed out by his deputy remains a topic of historical conjecture. But two weeks later the government-controlled media announced the discovery of “a treacherous, low plot,”¹⁶ perpetrated by disloyal members of the party against the country’s new president. This “discovered” conspiracy would allow Hussein to eliminate remaining potential rivals in the RCC at the dawn of his absolutist and totalitarian rule.

It may very well have been that some members of the RCC preferred Bakr to stay in office, fearing the autocratic proclivities of Saddam Hussein. The evidence of a wide-ranging plot to forcibly topple the new president was paper thin, dependent on the testimony of one RCC member who had been relieved of his post and showed signs of torture. In all, sixty-six senior party members, including five members of the RCC, were summarily tried. Fifty-five were found guilty and twenty-two sentenced to death. Not only were the executions immediate, subject to no legal appeal, but they were carried out by the colleagues of the accused, themselves senior members of the political leadership. Saddam Hussein insisted on filming the whole grisly affair, with instructions to distribute copies among the membership of the party and the military. This served two purposes: spreading culpability and demonstrating the consequence of dissent. In the following weeks and months, Hussein would carry out wider purges within the party as a whole, and among the military, bureaucracy, and professional associations.

On his own now, without the moderating impact of Bakr and other senior members of the political leadership, Saddam Hussein set out to fashion a system of government in which supreme unquestioned power was vested in his person. At the very basis of the system was the imposition of a reign of terror that would hold an entire population hostage to the will and whim of the president. Saddam would simply build, excessively and indiscriminately as it turned out, on Baathist fascination with “cruelty.” In the Saddamist scheme of things, the use of cruelty translated into a breathtaking expansion of the institutions of coercion. Intelligence services proliferated, the numbers of secret police and spies multiplied, and party militia roamed the streets. One seasoned observer of Saddam’s Iraq made an interesting claim that by

¹⁵ Quoted in Karsh and Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein*, 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

1980 “one fifth of the economically active Iraqi labor force was institutionally charged . . . with one form or another of violence.”¹⁷ The slightest divergence (not even dissent) from state policy would result in years of dreadful incarceration and unspeakable atrocities.¹⁸ People would be picked up from their homes, imprisoned and tortured for no reason other than appearing amused by an innocuous joke about the regime. School teachers were in a state of constant panic lest they said something in class that might contradict a passing utterance by Saddam. Even inside the supposed sanctity of the home, parents would be wary about saying something that might be related outside the home by their children. Families conversed in accordance with an Iraqi dictum, *ilhitan ‘idha adhan* (the walls have ears). And when the reckless few attempted a move against the president, the sadistic wrath of the state would descend not just on the perpetrators, but on their families, clans, and villages as well. A horrific example of this were the assaults of genocidal proportions that the state waged against the Kurdish population in the north of Iraq in the late 1980s, and again in 1991, this time along with the Shiites in the south.

The primary purpose of the machinery of the government was to facilitate the president’s absolute political control and psychological hold over peoples’ lives. In addition to the considerable increase in the use of terror, what separates the post-1979 period from the earlier decade of Baathist rule, politically as well as culturally and intellectually, was the extraordinary personalization of political power; the effort to appropriate every cultural symbol onto the person of Saddam Hussein; the determined elevation of his persona to the forefront of the consciousness of every Iraqi. It was essential that the president be perceived as the sole arbiter of power, the lone dispenser of justice, the unitary figurehead to whom the loyalty of all true citizens would be

¹⁷ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, 38. This of course includes conscripts to the army who probably were there for no other reason but to inflate the size of the army. The goal was to score political points by impressing upon the Arabs and Iraq’s neighbors the newly found power of Iraq and its leader.

¹⁸ The scientist Husayn al-Shahristani, later a minister of petroleum in the post-Saddam era, spent twelve years in prison (1979–1991) in which he endured all kinds of maltreatment because he had counseled caution on the issue of nuclear weapons. See his *al-Hurub ila al-Huriya: Awraq min Ayam al-Mihna fi Sujun Saddam* (Tehran: Dar Muhibi al-Husayn, 2000).

directed. After July 1979, a more fitting and correct designation of the Baathist state would be the Saddamist state.

Saddam enacted institutional reforms to cement not just the centrality of the presidency, but the personalization of the office. He made sure that members of the RCC owed their elevated status to him personally and not to such outdated notions as “party seniority” and “Baathist fidelity.” Indeed, in years to come, real political power in Iraq would devolve gradually to men who were tied to Saddam by tribal and familial bonds. This was a natural development that signified the waning of ideological ties as the Baath Party continued to lose its earlier institutional luster, turning into yet another agency for mobilizing the masses for the leader, getting thousands of school and college students into the streets shouting their devotion to Saddam and hurling abuse at the president’s enemy du jour, erecting huge billboards of the president on almost every street corner, spying on unsuspecting citizens, insuring conformity, and punishing the slightest whiff of dissent. This could be discerned from the not so subtle changes in the daily discourse within the party regarding Saddam. In the 1970s, he was introduced in party meetings and conferences as *al-rafiq* (comrade), but after 1979 that designation quickly disappeared, and was replaced by *al-ra’is* (President), soon to be embellished by a variety of adjectives, such as *al-munadhil* (struggler), *al-batal* (hero), *al-mufakir* (thinker), etc.

Simultaneously, state agencies in charge of cultural production focused their attention exclusively on the glorification and aggrandizement of Saddam Hussein. A deluge of books and articles by journalists and academics, underwritten by the ministry of Culture and Information, raved about Saddam’s unparalleled genius, best captured by the infantile ramblings of a professor of literature at Baghdad University. According to this starry-eyed groupie, Saddam’s genius “covers all aspects of the lives of individuals, their societies, countries, nations, and humanity as a whole, through the submissions, treatments, values, practices, explanations, writings, speeches, declarations, and responses which are the hallmark of the personality, genius, wisdom, and humanity of Commander Saddam Hussein.”¹⁹ Beyond the written word, the

¹⁹ Tariq Ibrahim Braysem, *al-‘Abqariya al-‘Arabiya bayn al-Farouk ‘Umar wa Saddam Husayn* (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu’un al-Thaqafiya al-‘Amma, 1991), 145.

ministry of culture and information began also to dig deep into Iraq's illustrious history and draw a continuous cultural and political route starting from the glittering civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia,²⁰ running through the famed Baghdad-based Islamic empires, and ending with modern Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Whether the idea came from Saddam or from one of his cultural cronies, immense resources were allocated to the endeavor that included the reconstruction of temples and arches of ancient Babylon, in which the bricks used had Saddam's name inscribed on them. In Baghdad, a billboard, portraying the president and the sixth-century B.C. King of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar shaking hands, depicted Saddam looking down on the legendary Babylonian King.²¹ In the 1980s and later, it was common place to see Saddam being mentioned not just as one of the luminaries of Mesopotamian and Islamic history, but decidedly as the overachiever among them.

This pervasive cultural invasion would be represented in the most garish and sinister of ways in the huge four to five storey portraits of the president that adorned the streets of Iraq's major cities. Here was the ubiquitous Saddam Hussein looking down on a population afraid even to gaze upwards. Such a psychological milieu of purposeful subjugation would impact not just ordinary citizens, but inevitably the political elites as well, even the most senior members of the political leadership. Increasingly, these would not dare debate or argue a point that had been decreed by Hussein. Indeed, none of these supposedly "key" decision-makers considered themselves any longer a "colleague" of Saddam, simply a subordinate who owed his privileged position to the President. No wonder then that in 1995 'Adnan 'Abd al-Majid Jasim, the Minister of Industry, traditionally one of the more important cabinet ministers, since war production was part of his jurisdiction, would publicly promise Saddam that the Iraqi people would "sacrifice themselves and what they have for your sake so that you will continue

²⁰ The best and earliest analyses of the efforts to revive Mesopotamia in the consciousness of Iraqis can be found in Amalia Baram's two articles, "Culture in the Service of *Wataniya*: The Treatment of Mesopotamia-Inspired Art in Ba'thi Iraq," *Asian and African Studies* vol. 17 (Fall, 1983): 256–331, and "Mesopotamian Identity in Ba'thi Iraq," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19 (November 1983): 426–55.

²¹ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 323n53.

to be a bright sun.”²² In a similar vein, Tariq ‘Aziz, who, as a long-standing member of the RCC was no political slouch himself, would write an article about Hussein that read like a teenager’s gushing love letter, eulogizing his beloved “hero-president” as “the struggler, the organizer, the thinker, and the leader.”²³ Not to be outdone, the Deputy Chairman of the RCC, ‘Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, supposedly second only to Saddam himself in the political hierarchy, would publicly, and seemingly without a hint of embarrassment, remind his audience of their good fortune for having a president who had been “enlightened by God” so that “he can meet his destiny . . . to be the leader of this nation and its march and history and achieve glory for it.”²⁴ Such panegyrics were in no way exceptional or out of place; they were typical of the times as people responded to, and were swept into, the all-encompassing aura of the personality cult.

So extreme was the cult of personality that even those who belonged to the venerated first Baathist generation, such as Michel Aflaq, the founding father of the Baath Party, and others of similar stature, pivotal players who for years had stood at or near the center stage of ideational and political influence at a time when Saddam was in charge of nothing more than running messages from hideout to hideout, were purposely reduced to the role of toadying cheerleaders, and were brought out periodically to render their obligatory praises of the new icon for the ages. It is within this context that a long-standing and highly respected Syrian Baathist leader, who because of doctrinal differences was forced to leave Syria and live in Iraq, would agree to write a laudatory foreword to a book on Saddam that was published in 1994, three years after the disasters wrought upon Iraq by Saddam’s catastrophic decision to fight the world over Kuwait. The Baathist leader would write: “the Arab nation has selected from its sons and heroes a historical leader, embodying all the characteristics of cultural heroism, in order to implant the foundation for a new civilizational order.”²⁵ It

²² The Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Near East and South Asia* (Hereafter, FBIS, *Daily Report*), August 25, 1995, 41.

²³ *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad), May 9, 1980.

²⁴ FBIS, *Daily Report*, September 1, 1995, 37.

²⁵ Hani Ibrahim ‘Ashour, *Saddam Husayn wa al-Numudhaj al-Hidhari al-Arabi* (Baghdad: Dar al-Huriya li al-Tiba’a, 1994), 10.

must be noted that this man was simply echoing the tone and rhythm of the book, written by a well-known Iraqi writer and journalist who dedicated it to Saddam in these words: "To you who taught a nation to be; and taught history to write itself; to you the towering spear in an era of bowed heads, to you O great commander, Saddam Hussein; I dedicate this book."²⁶ Such was the intellectual cowering brought about by the menacing and stifling personality cult built around Saddam Hussein.

The Hollowing of Tyranny

The dominance of Saddam Hussein had its peak during the 1970s, when he was both feared and admired. But then foreign adventures, fed by Saddam's own grandiose fantasies, would sap the strength of the political order he had built. Saddam's war with Iran (1980–1988) and against the world over Kuwait in 1991 would decimate the country's economy and create deep fissures in its social fabric. Because of the cost of these wars and the international economic sanctions imposed on Iraq, the days of plenty associated with the 1970s quickly unraveled.

The decade of success came to a halt in September 1980, when Saddam, having had enough of the aggressive rhetoric of the new Islamic republic in neighboring Iran, decided to use his much-vaunted military power to silence the shrill and unfriendly Shiite ayatollahs next door in Iran. The crisis had its roots in the 1979 Iranian revolution which toppled the powerful Pahlavi dynasty and created a Shiite Islamic republic. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, aggressively called for a similar revolution in Iraq. To Saddam, who belonged to the Sunni minority community, these calls represented a clear danger in their potential to stir incendiary sentiment among the majority Shiite population of Iraq. One would think that Saddam, who was then at the height of his popularity, would not be concerned by Khomeini's rants. However, a conspirator himself, lacking the assured security that fortifies legitimate democratic institutions, Saddam would

²⁶ Ibid., Dedication page.

not bet on Iraqis, particularly the Shiites, not falling prey to the appeals of the ayatollah. He thus would act decisively, as only authoritarian leaders are apt to do.

On September 22, 1980 Saddam sent thousands of Iraqi forces into Iran supported by blistering aerial attacks on Iranian positions. The strategy was to occupy the oil-producing southern part of Iran, control the oil, thus starving Iran of its only financial resource, and precipitate an early and unceremonious demise of the ayatollahs. But none of these grandiose goals would come to pass, and by December 1980, it had become apparent that the expected famous victory would evade the imperious president. Saddam, his army and his country would soldier on fighting a stalemate of a war that, by the time of its messy conclusion in 1988, had had a catastrophic effect on Iraq.

The country suffered over half a million casualties and its once dynamic economy was in tatters. Iraq's main oil terminals, refineries, and petrochemical plants in the south had been completely destroyed early in the war, and with that Iraq's daily oil production had fallen ominously from 3.4 million barrels in August 1980 to 800 thousand barrels exactly a year later.²⁷ It did recover to just over a million barrels a day in subsequent years, still only about a third of the country's pre-war production level. When the war began, Iraq had over \$35 billion in foreign reserves; by 1988, it had accumulated foreign debts of over \$100 billion.

The second stop on the country's path to eventual ruin occurred in August 1990. Barely two years after emerging debilitated and virtually bankrupt from the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam plunged Iraq into another personally directed misadventure that would turn out to be even more disastrous than the war with Iran. Overwhelmed by Iraq's financial abyss, which by 1990 had shown few signs of improvement, Saddam demanded that the Sheikdom of Kuwait, Iraq's tiny, yet oil-rich, southern neighbor, cut back on its oil production, stop an alleged encroachment on Iraqi oil fields, forgive Iraq's debts, and make further cash gifts to alleviate Iraq's economic crisis. After all, Saddam argued,

²⁷ Frederick Axelgard, "War and Oil: Implications for Iraq's Postwar Role in Gulf Security," in *Iraq in Transition: A Political, Economic and Strategic Perspective*, ed. by Frederick Axelgard (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 9.

all Iraq's hardships were incurred while the country was defending not just itself, but also Kuwait, the Gulf, indeed all Arabs from the irredentist designs of Iran's ayatollahs. When in the summer of 1990, the unexpected happened, and Kuwait did not cower, Saddam took it as a calculated insult to him personally, a public slap on the face that had to be punished. He resolved to invade Kuwait and rub the noses of its sheikhs in the blistering sands of mid-summer.

Until a meeting on the eve of the invasion, there is no evidence that the RCC or the cabinet, supposedly the pivotal decision-making institutions in the land, were involved in any meaningful discussion, any analysis of the pros and cons, of the looming international crisis. If anyone was consulted or told of the impending decision, it would have been the few members of Saddam's immediate family and clan.²⁸ On August 2, 1990, Iraqi forces poured into Kuwait, and within a few hours were in control of the country. The Kuwaiti ruling family escaped to Saudi Arabia, and soon watched Saddam officially annex their country making it the nineteenth province of Iraq.

That Saddam miscalculated was quickly evident when a joint US-USSR statement condemned the Iraqi action, and the Security Council called for an immediate withdrawal. This was compounded when five days later, American troops began to deploy in Saudi Arabia. Within a month, an impressive international coalition, that included a plethora of Muslim and Arab partners, had been amassed, with many contributing troops, and at the end of November the United Nations sanctioned the use of force if Iraq had not withdrawn from Kuwait by January 15, 1991.

But Saddam would not budge. He categorically rebuffed a number of mediation offers from the United Nations, the European Community, France, the Soviet Union, and others, and would brook no argument from his own RCC members. At some point around mid-December, Saddam had decided that Iraq could, indeed would, win a war against America and the world. In a catastrophic turn of fanciful and callous self-delusion, he believed that his army, seasoned in ground warfare against the Iranians, would eventually bog down the invaders, inflict huge casualties on them, and force them to turn back

²⁸ See Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 225–28.

and sue for peace.²⁹ His “mother of all battles” would be the ultimate proof of his valor, genius, and perhaps his infallibility.

That of course was sheer fantasy. After almost six weeks of unrelenting bombardment from the air, the ground campaign began on February 24, 1991 and in just over two days, Kuwait had been liberated. Two days after that, when coalition forces stopped their lightning and almost unchallenged advance, which had brought them deep into Iraqi territory, over two thirds of Saddam’s much vaunted and lionized army had been decimated, and some 90,000 Iraqi troops had surrendered or been captured. Saddam had handed his country and people one of the most comprehensive and devastating defeats in contemporary warfare.

Immediately, major insurrections erupted in the southern Shi’ite part of the country and in the Kurdish north. The regime was at such a state of political disarray that it probably would have taken the United States no more than a gentle prod to dismantle the entire political edifice. But the US stayed put, giving Saddam the breather he needed and had not expected, to launch a counter assault on the Shi’ite and Kurdish rebels that, in true Saddam fashion, exacted savage retribution on everyone regardless of culpability. In the south, Saddam dispatched Republican Guard divisions, consisting mainly of Sunni troops, backed by some of the most unrestrained elements of state and Party security. Purposeful bombardment was aimed at houses with little regard for its occupants, and people were shot in the streets indiscriminately. Rotting bodies were left in full public view, and those attempting to retrieve them for burial were themselves shot at and killed. Within less than three weeks, over 30,000, including women and children, had been killed, and some 70,000 had fled the country, mainly to neighboring Iran.³⁰ Turning to the north, Saddam’s troops

²⁹ On January 20, Saddam issued a statement aimed at bolstering the morale of his population, which had been subjected to savage daily bombardment from the air, promising ultimate victory, since “our ground forces have not entered the battle so far.” When that would happen, “the deaths on the allied side will be increased with God’s help. When the deaths and dead mount on them, the infidels will leave and the flag of Allahu Akbar will fly over the mother of all battles.” Quoted from Iraqi radio in Karsh and Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein*, 252.

³⁰ Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 251.

followed similar tactics which were to lead to the flight of more than two million Kurds, who, terrified of the regime's renowned cruelty, made their way to the mountainous borders with Iran and Turkey. With barely any food or belongings, braving the most appalling conditions, thousands were to die, many of them children and infants. The human tragedy unfolded on television screens and led to an international outcry. In response, the United States, supported by the United Kingdom and France, imposed a no-fly zone above the 36th parallel, which effectively sealed the Kurdish areas from the Iraqi army and allowed the Kurdish population to return to its homes.

Saddam would never regain control over the northern part of his country. From 1991 until the forcible ouster of the regime in 2003, the Kurds would lead an autonomous existence of the central government in Baghdad. Meanwhile, crippled by international economic sanctions, the now tarnished president, a symbol of unbridled excess, would rule over a decaying state and a teetering economy, infested by graft, corruption, and nepotism. In the decade that followed the 1991 Gulf war, the gross domestic product remained literally stagnant, growing from \$29 billion in 1992 to \$31 billion in 1999, a measly 7 percent over the entire 6 years.³¹ The literacy rate among the Iraqi population, which in 1985 stood at 48 percent, underwent a dramatic decline to 27 percent by the year 2000.³² By the end of the twentieth century, and on the eve of Saddam's removal from power in 2003, much of the impressive advances that had been achieved in the 1970s had all but disappeared.

The Liabilities of Dictatorship

In thinking about the disasters of the Iraq–Iran war and the 1991 Gulf conflict, it is not analytically precise to conclude that there was no rational basis for Saddam to go to war, even if the results were hardly what he had anticipated. A balanced and objective calculus of the costs and benefits, and of the probabilities of success, could certainly

³¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2000, 142.

³² Annemarie Muth, *Statistical Abstract of the World*, second edition (Detroit: Gale Group, 1996), 441.

be constructed to show that Saddam's actions were not mere fanciful misadventures, but were based on rational assessment of a variety of factors. In 1980, Iran's political order was showing signs of fragility; secular revolutionary forces were fighting Khomeini's supporters in the streets of the capital Tehran, Khomeini had cashiered much of Iran's officer corps, and the south of Iran, the target of Iraq's attack, was predominantly Arab in ethnicity. As for 1991, the U.S. was believed to be still in the grip of the "Vietnam Syndrome," Europe was preoccupied with the extraordinary happenings in the Eastern Bloc, and a betting man's money would be on the Arab and Islamic world vigorously opposing a Western military attack on an Arab country. In short, Saddam's decisions could be shown to have been measured and deliberate, and the fact that things ultimately did not work out should not signify an absence of decision-making rationality.

This analysis could be applied not just to Saddam Hussein, but to other world dictators. The problem is that any such rationality would at best be limited by two factors: one intrinsic to the dictator himself, and the other extrinsic. Dictators might think things through, but this thought process is inexorably linked to their uncommonly elevated opinion of their capabilities and inflated perception of their stature. Impacted by such emotional, almost delusional, impulses, not only would the process of decision-making be impaired but the likelihood of reassessing the decision, or turning back from it altogether, is much less likely.

Rationality is further degraded by the chronic shortage of other assessments and opinions against which the dictator's decision could and should be evaluated. This is especially true of totalitarian rulers such as Saddam, Ceaușescu, or Stalin. These men's control of all aspects of life in the country was such that no one would dare question their wisdom. The possibility, therefore, that an opposing, even probing, viewpoint would be put on the table was almost nonexistent. And that pattern of governance, of the all-knowing, all-controlling, imperious president surrounded by a compliant loyal flock, exacting savage punishment on perceived rivals and foes would continue until they die or they are deposed.

Much like other totalitarian dictatorships, Saddam's Iraq was a country that was held hostage to the will and whim of one omnipresent tyrant. Saddam's Iraq was the exclusive creation of the man

who effectively ruled the country for thirty-five years. He constructed, and over time refined, a relentless police state that was defined almost solely by its pervasive and barbaric agencies of coercion. Such coercion was not only physical but intellectual as his institutions of cultural production facilitated the emergence of a “personality cult” that was dedicated to the indulgent aggrandizement of the president. No policy of any other leader or government of Iraq even approximated to Saddam’s genocidal assaults on his own people and his malevolent intrusion into the lives of its citizens. At no time since the birth of the state of Iraq in 1921 were fundamental values and beliefs so utterly subjugated to the dictates, quirks, and ramblings of the country’s “hero-president.”

JAN-WERNER MÜLLER

*Calming the Ideological Storms?
Reflections on Cold War Liberalism*

If Goethe claimed towards the end of his life that every reasonable person today is a moderate liberal, then in our time one must say: every reasonable person is a moderate socialist.

—Thomas Mann, 1950

I do not think that the answer to Communism is a counter faith, equally fervent, militant, etc., because one must fight the devil with the devil's weapons. To begin with, nothing is less likely to create a 'faith' than perpetual reiteration of the fact that we are looking for one, must find one, are lost without one, etc.

—Isaiah Berlin, 1952

If, as the title of this volume suggests, twentieth-century history was ravaged by "ideological storms," it might seem pedantic—but still not entirely superfluous—to point out that these storms were, after all, man-made.¹ Yet emphasizing individual human agency in the creation

¹ I draw here on thoughts first developed in "Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 7 (2008): 45–64, "The Triumph of What (if anything)? Political Ideologies and Political Institutions in Twentieth-Century Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 14 (2009): 211–26, "Value Pluralism in Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Thought," in *Modern Pluralism: Anglo-American Debates since 1880*, ed. by Mark Bevir (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), 81–104; "The Contours of

of major political cataclysms (and mass atrocity) invites the thought that what often used to be called “the age of ideologies” was ultimately caused by nothing but crazed intellectuals: out-of-control utopians, fanatical believers is the one and only right answer to the riddle of history, etc.² This thought is not entirely wrong. However, as I have tried to argue in a number of writings, it can easily obscure the fact that political thinkers in the circumstances of twentieth-century European history were often responding to particular challenges which liberal democracy, in the eyes of many observers (and not just of committed antiliberals) seemed unable to meet.³ And they were offering their own more or less practical solutions to these challenges. Uncovering such a logic of challenge and response—a logic which both Max Weber and R. J. Collingwood considered crucial for making past thought intelligible—is not at all the same as legitimizing these solutions (especially not the “final solutions”). But it is indispensable, when it comes to trying to learn something—anything—from the story of twentieth-century Europe. For it is comforting, but ultimately misleading and potentially even counterproductive, to think that those espousing totalitarian ideologies were simply doing so out of inborn cruelty, or out of vanity, or because they had failed to listen up when the axioms of nineteenth-century liberalism were part of the lesson plan. We can tell the story of twentieth-century political thought (and politically engaged intellectuals) as a morality tale, involving temptations, heroic resistance to temptation, and moral good triumphing in the end—but this is not always the most helpful way of telling the story, to put it mildly.

Cold War liberalism (Berlin’s in particular),” in *Isaiah Berlin’s Cold War Liberalism*, ed. by Jan-Werner Müller (forthcoming), and, especially, my *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Yale UP, 2011). Thanks to Vladimir Tismaneanu for inviting me to expand my thoughts on Cold War liberalism.

² The classic account is Karl Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeit der Ideologien: Eine Geschichte politischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982). See also Jean-François Revel, *The Totalitarian Temptation*, trans. David Hapgood (London: Penguin, 1978).

³ As Giovanni Gentile once put it pithily, “Fascism came into being to meet serious problems of politics in post-war Italy.” See Giovanni Gentile, “The Philosophic Basis of Fascism,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 6 (1927/28): 290–304; here 301.

If what I have just suggested is broadly true, it might prompt the question as to what those who explicitly opposed totalitarian ideologies thought they were doing. Of course, an immediate answer, the one indebted to Weber and Collingwood, would go like this: they were responding to the challenges of totalitarianism. And that is clearly right. Those intellectuals I shall focus on in this essay—often grouped together under the label “Cold War liberals”—were, above all, anti-totalitarians. But they were so in a very specific sense: they understood that totalitarianism was not simply a political fantasy created by crazed and hateful minds. Unlike later liberals who might have shared the substance of Cold War liberal beliefs, but lacked a clear understanding of what these beliefs were directed against, these thinkers were acutely aware that totalitarianism had *also* presented itself as a set of solutions to seemingly intractable problems—and therefore proved seductive for evidently noncrazed intellectuals.⁴ Hence Cold War liberals were also under pressure to offer rival answers to practical challenges—or, if agreement on solutions was unlikely to be reached within the foreseeable future, they had to offer an account of how ongoing political conflict was to be managed in some recognizably liberal fashion.

In this essay, I seek to focus on these often overlooked aspects of Cold War liberalism. I do not deny the point (which has often enough been made) that figures such as Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron, or Norberto Bobbio exemplified, above all, a particular liberal *temperament*. But, much as we might wish to believe that professors exemplifying a temperament can change the world, or at least be on the right side of history, we ought also to pay attention to the actual political principles—and underlying philosophical positions—which Cold War liberals

⁴ Witness, for instance, Isaiah Berlin's claim: “I find Nazi values detestable, but I can understand how, given enough misinformation, enough false belief about reality, one could come to believe that they are the only salvation. Of course, they have to be fought, by war if need be, but I don't regard the Nazis, as some people do, as literally pathological or insane, only as wickedly wrong, totally misguided about the facts, for example in believing that some beings are subhuman, or that race is central, or that Nordic races alone are truly creative, and so forth. I see how, with enough false education, enough widespread illusion and error, men can, while remaining men, believe this and commit the most unspeakable crimes.” See his “My Intellectual Path,” in *The Power of Ideas*, ed. by Henry Hardy (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 12–13.

articulated. We also should account for how fundamental philosophical positions, political principles, and what one might call *strategies of persuasion* relate to each other in Cold War liberalism. This is what I propose to do here. Cold War liberals did not simply seek to calm the ideological storm by staying calm themselves; they also sketched out conditions which would make such storms less likely in the future. In doing so, they relied on philosophies—value pluralism and antideterminism, above all; they defended particular principles—negative liberty, liberal constitutionalism and social security; and, not least, they devised strategies that depended on particular accounts of history and moral psychology, as well as what has been called an ‘ethos of dialogue’.

Putting Cold War Liberalism in (a Bit of) Context

I have argued elsewhere that in Western Europe one of the peculiarities of the aftermath of the high point of totalitarian politics was the following: both postwar political thought and postwar political institutions were deeply imprinted with antitotalitarianism. Political leaders, no less—and quite possibly more so—than jurists and philosophers, sought to build an order designed, above all, to prevent a return to the totalitarian past. To be sure, the “lessons of the past” were hardly unambiguous, and much postwar debate in Western Europe (as well as the United States) consisted precisely of contesting them.⁵ What eventually prevailed in these discursive battles was an image of the past as a chaotic era characterized by limitless political dynamism, unbound “masses” and attempts to forge a completely unconstrained political subject—such as the purified German *Volksgemeinschaft* or the “Soviet People” (created in Stalin’s image and ratified as really existing in the “Stalin Constitution”).

The emergence of what is often described as a thoroughly pragmatic form of postwar politics—“consensus politics”—was not just a matter of a subjective deradicalization in a supposedly post-ideological age, or the liberalization of potentially authoritarian thought sys-

⁵ For the German case, see, for instance, Sebastian Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex: Das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik 1945–1959* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

tems such as socialism and Catholicism.⁶ It rested, first and foremost, on a number of institutional innovations and attendant normative justifications (or sometimes just normative intuitions) of what politics should or should not be about. In particular, Western European political elites fashioned a highly *constrained* form of democracy, deeply imprinted with a distrust of popular sovereignty—in fact, even distrust of traditional *parliamentary* sovereignty.⁷

This was a new kind of democracy—whose novelty, however, was often obscured by the fact that its innovative institutions were publicly justified with highly *traditional* moral and political languages. For instance, religiously-inspired traditional natural law thinking underwent a major renaissance after the War (as did Christianity more broadly). This had a straightforward reason: many intellectuals hoped religion might provide immutable ethical foundations for right political conduct—thereby serving as the most secure protection against the relativism, if not outright nihilism, which supposedly had characterized fascism.

It proved highly seductive to present the postwar era not as the beginning of something new, but as a moral and intellectual *return* to something safely known. Yet in fact no democracy as a known set of institutions in any way “returned” and neither was “liberalism” in any nineteenth-century sense (as a matter of ideas or in terms of any recognizable class base) revived after 1945. What emerged instead might best be described as a new balance of, broadly speaking, democratic and liberal principles (and constitutionalism in particular)⁸—although such a formulation might still underestimate the novelty of what was crafted, as both liberalism and democracy were redefined in the light

⁶ For the diagnosis of “consensus politics,” see for instance Richard Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2001), 299–337. On the liberalization of postwar political thought, see Mark Lilla, “The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and its Discontents,” *Daedalus* vol. 123, no. 2 (1994): 129–57.

⁷ I am very much indebted for this idea and its subsequent elaboration in this essay to Peter Lindseth, “The Paradox of Parliamentary Supremacy: Delegation, Democracy, and Dictatorship in Germany and France, 1920–1950s,” *Yale Law Journal* (2004): 1341–415.

⁸ For this point, see also Marcel Gauchet, *L'avènement de la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

of the totalitarian experience of mid-twentieth-century Europe. The thinkers and institutional innovators engaged in this project were intensely aware that a “simple reassertion of liberal modernism had become radically insufficient”;⁹ and while de facto they fashioned many institutions and advanced values that could rightly be seen as *functional equivalents* of certain liberal ideas, the inherited political languages of liberalism were for the most part rejected—and often quite explicitly. Waldemar Gurian (to pick just one example), commenting on “ideological chaos” as the “most serious aspect” of his time, argued in 1946 that “liberalism has become obsolete in a period of the masses. Its concept of individualistic freedom appears as a concept meaningful only with the background of a comparatively secure world which accepts the common good as something self-evident.”¹⁰ Such rejections of liberalism as a form of materialism, individualism (understood simply as egotism), or relativism became commonplaces after 1945, and not just among conservative or Catholic thinkers like Gurian.

Thus, where totalitarian political theorists had sought mastery over history through fashioning new collective agents and devising new modes of political action—and a form of unconstrained and unconditional politics—the postwar antitotalitarians attempted to stabilize the political world by finding new institutional expressions of inherited liberal principles (such as checks and balances), or reviving older moral and religious precepts—all *without* re-deploying actual liberal languages.¹¹ What emerged, then, was not a restoration of liberal order—rather, it was emphatically a “post-post-liberal order” understood as a highly constrained form of democracy. This constellation of values and institutions—essentially a new intellectual synthesis—cannot be summed up as any kind of established “ism.” It was never formulated by a single thinker—though it had its fair number of thinkers (some of whom are hardly remembered today).

⁹ Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 1.

¹⁰ Waldemar Gurian, “After World War II,” *Review of Politics* vol. 8, no. 1 (1946): 7.

¹¹ For this conception of totalitarianism, see David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

New quasi-liberal institutions and decidedly nonliberal, if not outright antiliberal political idioms—this is the great paradox of the relationship between political thought and political institutions in the late 1940s and 1950s.

How does Cold War liberalism fit into this picture? One might say it does and it doesn't. It was exceptional in that Cold War liberals were not shy about invoking the "*l*-word." However, this is just another way of saying that Cold War liberalism was, first of all, an Anglo-American phenomenon, with more or less lone voices in continental European countries (think Aron in France or Bobbio in Italy). On the other hand, it was not so exceptional, after all: Cold War liberals were willing to speak their name, but, while seemingly more inclined to return to thinkers like Tocqueville and Mill, they also presented a highly idiosyncratic and in some respects original account of liberalism. Put differently: this was *liberalism after the failure of liberalism*, a chastened version that had to take leave of any conception of more or less automatic progress, or the necessary triumph of individualism, or any optimistic sense that, if only properly explained, liberal principles would be adopted by any rational person.

Cold War Liberal Principles

Perhaps some of us like to think that in the aftermath of historical catastrophes and mass atrocity, liberal values can simply be asserted as self-evident. The period of the 1940s and 1950s does not bear out this hope. History does not present obvious "lessons"; the meaning of the past is always contested; and even an appeal to basic emotional experience—what it is like to be a victim of politically produced prejudices, what it is like to suffer politically-induced cruelty—does not in any automatic way lead to the endorsement of liberal principles.

If this is right, then it will no longer come as such a surprise that Cold War liberals all thought about the *philosophical* stance which might underpin their politics. To be sure, they did not all think equally hard or deeply. But they all, I would venture, arrived at a form of what can be called *tempered value pluralism*. By this I mean a stance that posited both the incompatibility and incommensurability of human values, while avoiding the conclusions that the choice of values is com-

pletely irrational and that values will necessarily clash without any hope of political mediation. In other words, Cold War liberals affirmed a broadly Weberian account of value pluralism—and, like Weber, they sometimes emphasized the tragic consequences of value pluralism. But they also held that in practice pluralism could be negotiated and contained politically.¹² As Berlin summed up the point (somewhat nonchalantly) in a letter in December 1952, “it is all a matter of compromise and balance and adjustment and empirical Popperism, etc.”¹³

The obvious Cold War-related impetus of value pluralism (just as much as that of antideterminism) was anti-Marxist; put more generally, it was directed against political blueprints where all attractive

¹² Aron made it clear that he considered value pluralism a coherent philosophical position—but not one that was really ever lived in its strenuous, tragic Weberian version: “La formule de la « guerre des dieux » est la transposition d’un fait indiscutable – les hommes se sont fait des représentations incompatibles du monde – en une philosophie que personne ne vit ni ne pense parce qu’elle est contradictoire (toutes les représentations sont équivalents, aucune n’étant ni vraie ni fausse).” In that affirmation Cold War liberals were in the end not all that different from Weber himself, who, after all, also stressed that everyday life was not exactly a matter of agonizing over how to choose among values in deadly conflict. Witness his remark that “eine nicht empirische, sondern sinndeutende Betrachtung: eine echte Wertphilosophie also, würde ferner, darüber hinausgehend, nicht verkennen dürfen, daß ein noch so wohlgeordnetes Begriffsschema der ‘Werte’ gerade dem entscheidendsten Punkt des Tatbestandes nicht gerecht würde. Es handelt sich nämlich zwischen den Werten letztlich überall und immer wieder nicht nur um Alternativen, sondern um unüberbrückbar tödlichen Kampf, so wie zwischen ‘Gott’ und ‘Teufel.’ Zwischen diesen gibt es keine Relativierungen und Kompromisse. Wohlgemerkt: dem *Sinn* nach nicht. Denn es gibt sie, wie jedermann im Leben erfährt, der Tatsache und folglich dem äußeren Schein nach, und zwar auf Schritt und Tritt. In fast jeder einzelnen wichtigen Stellungnahme realer Menschen kreuzen und verschlingen sich ja die Wertsphären. Das Verflachende des ‘Alltags’ in diesem eigentlichsten Sinn des Wortes besteht ja gerade darin: daß der in ihm dahinlebende Mensch sich dieser teils psychologisch, teils pragmatisch bedingten Vermengung todfreundlicher Werte nicht bewußt wird und vor allem: auch gar nicht bewußt werden *will*, daß er sich vielmehr der Wahl zwischen ‘Gott’ und ‘Teufel’ und der eigenen letzten Entscheidung darüber: welcher der kollidierenden Werte von dem Einen und welcher von dem Andern regiert werde, entzieht.”

¹³ Isaiah Berlin, *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960*, eds. Henry Hardy and Jennifer Holmes, with the assistance of Serena Moore (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009), 352.

human values and practices could be fully realized without any costs or hard choices. Certainly, in the case of Berlin it is clear that he “discovered” value pluralism because he realized that what was wrong with communism was “monism.” Already in a 1949 sketch on “Democracy, Communism and the Individual” one finds the suggestion on Berlin’s part that the ultimate philosophical basis of totalitarianism might be something plausibly called “monism.” Like Jacob Talmon, Berlin traced totalitarianism, that is, both communism and fascism, back to Rousseau, in particular his supposed belief that there were right answers both to the question of individual conduct and the question of how best to organize society—and that these right answers should be “ruthlessly” imposed.¹⁴ According to Berlin, liberal democrats, in contrast to proponents of the utopian state, were characterized by a desire for “a necessarily precarious balance between incompatible ideals based on the recognition of the equal or nearly equal validity of human aspirations as such, none of which must be subordinated to any single uncriticisable single principle [sic].”¹⁵

There has been considerable debate as to how value pluralism and liberalism—understood as a privileging of the value of liberty—do or do not hang together.¹⁶ One relatively straightforward way of thinking about the relationship between the two is to claim that negative liberty allows for a large—perhaps the maximum—of value choices that do not inflict major costs on others (in other words: my choice of wanting to be the emperor enslaving vast numbers of people cannot be accommodated; but all kinds of eccentricities, for instance, can). But, of course, this presumes the desirability of such a maximum, or even of diversity as such—a rather shaky foundation, if any, for liberal politics. A different and in a sense bolder argument would hold that pluralism

¹⁴ Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955). See also Malachi H. Hacohen, “Jacob Talmon between Zionism and Cold War Liberalism,” *History of European Ideas*, vol. (2007): 146–57.

¹⁵ Isaiah Berlin. “Democracy, Communism and the Individual,” at *The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library*, <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/demco-mind.pdf>, referring to James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873).

¹⁶ For Berlin’s and Williams’ answer, see “Liberalism and Pluralism: A Reply,” *Political Studies*, vol. 41 (1994): 306–309.

is true because we know humans to be (and to want to be) free; and freedom in the sense of politically secured non-interference¹⁷ is in turn justified because of the truth of value pluralism: human beings are free and should be free because they can and should choose between different values, where one value does not obviously trump another. As Berlin put it, when advocating the truth of pluralism:

It is truer, because it does, at least recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another. To assume that all values can be graded on a scale, so that it is a mere matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents, to represent moral decisions as an operation which a slide-rule could, in principle, perform. . . . It is more humane because it does not (as the system-builders do) deprive men, in the name of some remote, or incoherent ideal, of much that they have found to be indispensable to their life as unpredictably self-transforming human beings.¹⁸

Alternatively, Berlin held that, irrespective of any consideration of human nature, value pluralism was simply *conceptually* true: “The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution in which all good things coexist seems to me not merely unobtainable—that is a truism—but conceptually incoherent. Some among the great goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.”¹⁹

But one might still ask how one can get from value pluralism specifically to liberalism.²⁰ Berlin initially was adamant that one entailed

¹⁷ I use this term to stress that Cold War liberals, given the emphasis they placed on constitutionalism, would have been sympathetic to the neo-republican objection that non-interference cannot depend on favors or goodwill, but must be secured with a proper legal framework.

¹⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 171.

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. by Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 13.

²⁰ Robert B. Talisse, “Does Value Pluralism Entail Liberalism?,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 7 (2010), 302–20.

the other; later he modified his position somewhat by insisting that value pluralism entailed liberalism not logically, but *psychologically*. To me, this seems a plausible claim, in the following sense: if one recognizes value pluralism to be true, one is arguably more inclined to adopt two positions which in some sense could be construed as psychological, as opposed to philosophical, ones: first, one is more likely to have empathy for the pursuit of ideals one does not share—after all, they might be genuine ideals, not just aberrations that could be corrected through rational insight; at least, then, one might be somewhat more inclined towards tolerance. Second, one is psychologically prepared for continuous conflict—something that is obviously hard to live with for those who find social harmony both a desirable and feasible ideal. It is a further—essentially historical—point to then say that liberalism has proven the best way of both enabling and containing conflicts. Altogether, this is still a shaky foundation for liberal politics, one that does not follow from standard assumptions from within value pluralism itself. But it is a plausible way to render the implications of what Berlin and Bernard Williams claimed in the epigraph quoted at the beginning:

There are indeed well-known and very important issues about the social and political stability of liberalism and of the outlooks historically associated with it. It is from concrete discussion of those issues, rather than from debate about logical possibilities, that the weaknesses of liberalism, and the problems of a self-conscious pluralism, are likely to emerge. Equally, it is from social and historical reality that we are likely to be instructed in liberalism's strengths, and to be reminded of the brutal and fraudulent simplifications which, as a matter of fact, are the usual offerings of its actual enemies.²¹

Leaving aside the question of whether liberalism can be convincingly grounded in value pluralism, one can say with more certainty that, historically, value pluralism had at least three essential *political* purposes for Cold War liberals: it showed that there was no final resolution to

²¹ Isaiah Berlin and Bernard Williams, "Pluralism and Liberalism: A Reply" (to George Crowder, "Pluralism and Liberalism," *Political Studies* 42 [1994]: 293–305), *Political Studies* 42 (1994): 309.

the riddle of history and, in particular, no complete congruence of individual and collective autonomy, in the way Rousseau (and possibly Marx) had promised; some social schemes were clearly better than others (there were no irrational choices), but no scheme could accommodate all genuinely valuable human aspirations (for critics of Cold War liberalism, this was of course simply a bit of conceptual acrobatics in the service of procapitalist apologetics).

Second, in the eyes of Cold War liberals, the truth of value pluralism established a presumption in favor of individual liberty, understood as negative liberty: a liberty that is about leaving as many doors as possible open (to adopt one of Berlin's own metaphors). Practically, this point translated into a suspicion of central planning and the imposition of one scheme of value choices on an entire society. In the eyes of their critics, this suspicion of course opened the door to a libertarian justification of a minimal state which protects no values whatsoever—other than law and order. Third, value pluralism meant that one should expect continuous conflict in history. Not necessarily bloody existential or ideologically driven conflict everywhere all the time—but conflict nonetheless. Hence the importance of reflecting on practices of tolerance, “compromise and balance and adjustment.”

Based on their belief in the truth of value pluralism, Berlin and fellow Cold War liberals advocated a certain kind of *political education*: Berlin insisted that value pluralism was the only plausible morality for grown-ups, arguing that “the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of childhood or the absolute values of our primitive past.”²² He conceded that it might be “perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity.”²³ Put differently: value monism—the supposedly single most important source of communism—was a kind of infantile disorder; once (politically) grown up, men and women had no reason to think much further about it (until the next generation of politi-

²² Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. by Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 242.

²³ *Ibid.*, 172.

cal infants arrived). But there would always have to be ever-renewed efforts in pluralist political education, which, among other things, meant cultivating a capacity to draw distinctions—in other words, a capacity not to collapse different values (“liberty is security,” that sort of thing), to recognize values for what they were (and, not accidentally or purposefully, for that matter, eliminate some of them, thereby impoverishing the realm of possible ideas about the good life²⁴), and to craft complex compromises in response to conflicts among values.²⁵

Continuous political education was one thing, appropriate political institutions another. Cold War liberals generally advocated constitutionalism, or what Aron once called a kind of “mixed regime”: structures that both enabled and contained as well as civilized ongoing political conflict.²⁶ Here Cold War liberals aligned closely with those postwar thinkers on the European continent who explicitly disavowed the “*l*-word,” but nevertheless sought to craft institutions which were meant to safeguard traditional liberal ideals (limited and divided power, recognition of a legitimate opposition, etc.) Except that none of

²⁴ Witness Bernard Williams’s observation: “Theory typically uses the assumption that we have too many ethical ideas, some of which may well turn out to be mere prejudices. Our major problem is actually that we have not too many but too few, and we need to cherish as many as we can.” See his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 117.

²⁵ See also the very insightful essay by Jonathan Allen, “What’s the matter with monism?,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 12 (2009): 469–89.

²⁶ Stuart Hampshire probably reflected most consistently and continuously on the theme of conflict. He held that conflict was inevitable and often intractable, but, according to Hampshire, “balanced adversarial reasoning,” or *audi alteram partem*, was universally recognized as the right (and, above all, fair) response to it: as Hampshire put it, “fairness in procedure is an invariable value, a constant in human nature.” The “universally acceptable rational procedures of negotiation” and the “intellectual procedures for adversary reasoning and compromise” were also the crucial protection “against the perennial evils of human life—physical suffering, the destructions and mutilations of war, poverty and starvation, enslavement and humiliation.” This was the “proper business of politics, as Hobbes perceived”—and it remained the same over time. See his *Innocence and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), *Justice is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), and, especially, *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983).

the Cold War liberals went into any great detail, as far as this craft was concerned. They were, generally speaking, not institution-builders.

But there was something else that was more practical and that has often been overlooked or purposefully downplayed in retrospect: Cold War liberals were effectively social democrats. They professed sympathy for the welfare state, and, broadly speaking, took a critical view of figures like Friedrich von Hayek (despite the fact that Hayek shared many Cold War philosophical foundations and clearly regarded himself as an intellectual combatant for Cold War liberalism).²⁷ Berlin said explicitly that he was in favor of a welfare state and even called himself an advocate of a “mild form of socialism.”²⁸ Malachi Haim Hacoheh’s research has shown that Popper, even after his radical break with the communism of his youth, continued to regard himself as a social democrat.²⁹ While Popper was present at the founding of the Mont Pèlerin Society—and, no doubt, always thought of himself as sharing much with Hayek—it is telling that he wanted the Society initially to be a broad coalition of liberals and socialists. In fact, Berlin himself described Popper’s Open Society—which he claims had a “considerable influence” on him—as “anti-totalitarian and anti-authoritarian and, indeed, anti-conservative,” even if at another point he lumped Popper together with Hayek as “too dogmatic & too conceited & removed from the actual lives of the people they are prescribing for: & blind, complacent, & scholastic.”³⁰ Raymond Aron, finally, voiced sometimes “regrets” about a liberalism that might have ensured more economic freedoms than the mid-twentieth-century Keynesian welfare state, but in the end he thought that realism, if nothing else, mandated a welfare state as appropriate for the industrial society which had emerged under modern conditions.³¹

²⁷ In turn, of course, Hayek has been seen as far too ‘Social Democratic’ by many libertarian thinkers.

²⁸ “Isaiah Berlin in conversation with Steven Lukes,” *Salmagundi*, no. 120 (Fall 1998): 52–134; here 76.

²⁹ Malachi Haim Hacoheh, *Karl Popper—The Formative Years, 1902–1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

³⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *Building: Letters 1960–1975*, eds. Henry Hardy and Mark Pottle (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 355.

³¹ As he put it in the preface: “Personnellement, keynésien avec quelque regret du libéralisme...” See Raymond Aron, *L’Opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 2002), 10.

Of course, personal professions are one thing—the inner logic of political ideas propounded quite another. Here the conceptions of freedom advocated by Cold War liberals are most telling, even if nothing like “mild socialism” could clearly be deduced from them. Berlin’s negative liberty was, as he himself said, “deliberately anti-Marxist”—but the point had been to save a notion of personal freedom (and of humans as “unpredictably self-transforming”) from the dangers of political oppression in the name of a positive, if not altogether specious notion of freedom. Late in life Berlin kept insisting that genuine positive liberty was also an important—albeit conflicting—value; and that, in general, his “idea of liberty” had always been “the possibility of the richest imaginable life.”³² Aron in turn explicitly criticized Hayek’s notion of liberty for being one-dimensional and ahistorical, and argued that the advanced industrial societies of the West had managed to find a *synthèse démocratico-libérale* which had absorbed the socialist critique of a purely negative understanding of liberty—very much in line with the demand voiced by Thomas Mann in the epigraph at the beginning of this essay.³³

This might still leave the possibility that for Cold War liberals the advocacy of the welfare state was a pragmatic and not a principled one: perhaps under different conditions, without the threat and competition of communism, their ideal society (a problematic term, of course: no society could realize all ideals) would have looked quite different. What speaks against such an interpretation is that all stressed the (ultimately psychological) need for security alongside the value of freedom. After all, while (like Hayek) they emphasized uncertainty and ignorance as inevitable facts of economic and political life, they also had a deep understanding of human frailty, the “strain” under which human beings suffered in the face of rapid and complex change, as well as the conflicts generated by change—and hence the fears which made monism and all kinds of intellectual opiates so tempting.

³² Isaiah Berlin and Beata Polanowska-Sygulska, *Unfinished Dialogue* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 122.

³³ Raymond Aron, “La définition libérale de la liberté,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. 2 (1961): 199–218; and, in particular, “Liberté, libérale ou libertaire?,” in *La liberté et l’ordre social: Textes des conférences et des entretiens organisés par les Rencontres Internationales de Genève* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1969), 67–112.

Of course, many libertarians—Hayek and the representatives of the neoliberal Freiburg School, for instance—also did not simply celebrate the strength of the capitalist entrepreneur or see the market as an unmixed blessing: there remains a world of difference between Hayek’s followers and, let’s say, Ayn Rand’s outright Social Darwinist procapitalist dogma. Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow (Hayek much less so) looked to Christianity and cultural traditions to compensate for the moral damage the market may inflict; and the very notion of *ordo* betrayed the religious roots of the Freiburg School and some of Hayek’s disciples in the US.³⁴ Berlin, Aron, and Popper, on the other hand, never advocated such forms of compensation; their advocacy of liberty was not accompanied by a *basso continuo* of cultural pessimism, or a longing for the certainties of revelation or some supposedly incontestable philosophical anthropology (summed up, for instance, in Rüstow’s conception of a *Vitalsituation* appropriate for human beings as such).³⁵ In many ways, they actually had more trust in individual human beings than the libertarians who drew on Hayek’s and Röpke’s teachings.

Cold War Liberal Strategies

Cold War Liberalism, it has sometimes been said, was as much, if not more, a matter of a particular temperament or sensibility as “abstract thought.” There is clearly something to this—but this emphasis on psychology, can also be somewhat misleading. It might suggest that what we need is just an appropriate amount of agonizing over our choices (in lieu of “abstract thought”), when in fact the latter surely is one important ingredient in arriving at a justifiable choice. What was peculiar about Cold War liberalism was a number of practical consider-

³⁴ See also Carl Joachim Friedrich, “The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 49 (1955): 509–25, and Philip Manow, “Ordoliberalismus als ökonomische Ordnungstheologie,” *Leviathan*, vol. 29 (2001): 179–98.

³⁵ The classic work of neoliberal cultural pessimism was Röpke’s *Die Gesellschaftskrise der Gegenwart* (Erlenbach–Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1942), in particular the passages about modern “massification,” or what Röpke called, in an absolutely untranslatable phrase, “einen die Gesellschaftsstruktur zerstörenden Zerbröckelungs- und Verklumpungsprozeß” (23).

ations and, I would say, strategies which supplemented the principles discussed further above. To avoid misunderstandings: these were not simply a matter of presentation, of sugar-coating, or, for that matter, of manipulation. Rather, these considerations colored Cold War liberalism as a whole. I am thinking of three in particular.

First, Cold War liberal thinkers sought to be at least somewhat historical in their approach to politics or, put differently, self-contextualizing. It was explicitly informed by the memories of the 1930s and 1940s. As I have argued elsewhere, Cold War liberalism constituted a form of what Judith Shklar famously called a liberalism of fear: such liberalism was supposed to be particularly sensitive to past experiences of mass atrocity and politically motivated cruelty.³⁶ Where Bernard Williams put forward the equation “liberalism = basic legitimation demand + modernity,” Shklar, one might infer, advanced a somewhat more complex formula: “liberalism of fear = basic legitimation demand + modernity chastened by the experience of totalitarianism.”³⁷ She also held that the liberalism of fear “may well be what Emerson called a party of memory rather than a party of hope” and that “a strongly developed historical memory” was the “faculty of the human mind” on which the liberalism of fear “drew most heavily.”³⁸

Second, Cold War liberalism—especially in Berlin’s thought—sought to pay attention to what one might call the moral psychological aspects of politics. Berlin, in his explorations in the history of ideas, probed the psychology of extremist politics proposed by what he sometimes called “black thinkers” —which kind of temperament is drawn to it; what rationalizations do those engaged in extremist politics offer to themselves and others; where have liberals failed to engage the prob-

³⁶ Of course, Shklar’s contribution to political thought is not exhausted by the liberalism of fear, even if it seems likely that she will, above all, be remembered for this particular theory (or sketch of a theory). See Katrina Forrester, “Hope and Memory in the Thought of Judith Shklar,” *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 8 (2011): 591–620.

³⁷ See Bernard Williams, “Realism and Moralism in Political Theory,” in Geoffrey Hawthorn, ed., *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 1–17.

³⁸ Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. by Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 26, 27.

lems and challenges understood by antiliberal thinkers.³⁹ Shklar was also particularly sensitive to the moral-psychological aspects of politics. Drawing on novels and plays in particular, she put forward a profound moral-psychological account to support her distinctive form of liberalism. It was rooted in a fear of “absolute evil”—which Shklar identified as cruelty as well as a fear of “systematic fear” pervading society. It sought its basis in “common and immediate experiences,” not “moral or ideological aspirations,” as Shklar put it.⁴⁰ And she was adamant that “there is nothing ‘reductive’ about building a political order on the avoidance of fear and cruelty unless one begins with a contempt for physical experience”—while conceding that there might well be “more exhilarating but less urgent forms of liberal thought.”⁴¹ As I have tried to suggest above, even common and immediate experiences might not automatically make citizens embrace certain political principles; moral claims—though not necessarily “aspirations”—still need to be articulated. The point is that Shklar and others wanted liberals to reflect on their own position in history and on the psychological preconditions (and costs) of endorsing and living by liberal principles.

Third, Cold War liberalism was obviously a politically engaged form of thought. As Bernard Williams has pointed out in an important essay on Berlin as an exemplar of the liberalism of fear, it was a liberalism directed not only towards academic political theorists, but also towards “founding fathers,” state power holders, and, in the last instance, towards everybody.⁴² It sought to influence under particular political circumstances. And it sought to take the intellectual-cum-political fight to the enemy. It was militant. Yet in another sense it was precisely not militant.

Let me try to explain. As many observers have noted, Cold War liberals—with the possible exception of Popper who grew ever more cranky and intolerant with age⁴³—tended to be generous with their

³⁹ Berlin, *Building*, 103.

⁴⁰ Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” 31–32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32 and 38.

⁴² Bernard Williams, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. by Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).

⁴³ Karl Popper, *After The Open Society: Selected Social and Political Writings*, ed. by Piers Norris Turner and Jeremy Shearmur (London: Routledge, 2011).

intellectual opponents, rather than demonizing them. Most of them positively admired Marx—at least to some degree—and sought to find bridgeheads for their thought within intellectual enemy territory, so to speak. Ideological commitment by Marxists was not supposed to be countered with equally fervent commitment to a dogmatic liberalism; rather, uncertainty, doubt, and a charitable attitude towards one's adversaries ought to be part of the very case for liberalism. Think for instance of Norberto Bobbio, a self-described *perenne dubitante* (perennial doubter), a liberal who constantly sought to engage his ideological enemies and often lauded for his “ethos of dialogue” (in the words of Nadia Urbinati). As Bobbio explained at one point:

It might be logically consistent to answer intolerance with intolerance, but it is ethically poor and perhaps politically disadvantageous. One can never be sure that the person who is intolerant will understand the ethical value of respecting others' views once they are accepted within the liberal camp. It is, however, certain that a persecuted and excluded intolerant will never become a liberal. It is worth risking liberty by making its enemy its beneficiary if the only alternative is to limit liberty to the point of suffocating it or not allowing it to bear fruit. Much better an always endangered but expansive liberty than a liberty well protected but unable to develop.⁴⁴

I think that this was not just a matter of charitable, generous subjective attitudes. Rather, it seems to me that this firmly committed, but in important aspects nonfervent Cold War liberalism was based on theoretical positions, value pluralism in particular, along the lines I suggested above: an inclination to respect the ideals of others, even if one disagrees about their overall importance or the chances of practically realizing them, and a willingness to craft complex and potentially risky compromises. But this attitude in turn inspired theoretical positions. In particular, Cold War liberals wanted to preserve freedom, and reduce fear in a society (very much in line with Shklar's understanding of

⁴⁴ Quoted by Nadia Urbinati, “Liberalism in the Cold War: Norberto Bobbio and the dialogue with the PCI,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* vol. 8 (2003): 586.

a “liberalism of fear”)—but they did not, with ideological fervor, wish to destroy all potential sources of political oppression: they preferred what Bobbio called “an always endangered but expansive liberty.” Put differently, they did not seek to create an anticommunist “counter-faith” or render liberty so “robust” that the effort of making it robust could in turn come to destroy liberty (or other genuine human values, for that matter).

This was a delicate balancing act, of course, and one that required political judgment (in turn based on knowledge of history and on psychological insight, among other things).⁴⁵ One aspect of political judgment was the hazardous, but not arbitrary assessment of others’ likely action—or, put more generally, an assessment of probabilities. To pick up considerations put forward by Robert E. Goodin and Frank Jackson, one might say that these liberals certainly wished for a free citizenry—but they did not think it reasonable to strive for a complete elimination of fear among the citizenry.⁴⁶ They sought to think about probable dangers, not so much generally possible ones. Put less abstractly: the Soviets might come to conquer and oppress—always a possibility, but, as Aron in particular kept pointing out, after a certain point in the Cold War this was not really very likely. One should not try to eliminate that remaining possibility through the liberal West

⁴⁵ It is important not to be formulaic here: the right doses of “history” and “psychology” will not automatically result in “capacity for historical judgment”; if anything, we ought to imagine a circular process where history and psychology in turn are judged. It seems to me problematic to try to read “ineluctable necessities” off the historical record (as suggested in the statement: “we shall need to study what history tells us of the ineluctable necessities of political life, and then work out what those necessities entail for the kinds of political prescriptions issued by political philosophers.”). See Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears, “Introduction,” in *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, ed. by Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 4. See also the chapter on “utopophobia” in David M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), as well as Raymond Geuss, “Realismus, Wunschdenken, Utopie,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* vol. 58 (2010): 419–29.

⁴⁶ Robert E. Goodin and Frank Jackson, “Freedom from Fear,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol. 35 (2007): 249–65. But see also: Philip Pettit, “The Instability of Freedom as Noninterference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin,” *Ethics* vol. 121 (2011): 693–716.

waging a war itself. The consequence was a certain amount of justified and, one might say, rationally acceptable fear in society—and the price for complete freedom from fear would in all likelihood have been far, far too high. Uncertainty was a permanent political condition; the quest for certainty was likely to have disastrous results—but the question how much uncertainty was tolerable could never be answered in the abstract. It had to be subject to proper political judgment, which Berlin once described as “an acute sense of what fits with what, what springs from what, what leads to what; how things seem to vary to different observers, what the effect of such experience upon them may be; what the result is likely to be in a concrete situation of the interplay of human beings and impersonal forces—geographical or biological or psychological or whatever they may be.”⁴⁷ So “freedom from fear” should not be sought at any price. Politics was a matter of hard choices and not of certainties; one had to exercise judgment and could not simply apply rules or rely on “equations” of one sort or another.

To us, contemporary readers, these might sound like banalities. But for the Cold War liberals, the strains of politics also explained why antiliberal positions retained their power to attract and why “ideological storms” were neither caused by the world-historical climate, so to speak, nor by crazed individual intellectuals. They were likely to recur, and reacting to them appropriately—and not over-reacting and losing one’s political calm—remained a matter of difficult political judgment. This is a lesson which surely retains its value in the twenty-first century.

⁴⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1999), 46.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM
*Fear and Freedom
in Contemporary China*

How free is today's People's Republic of China (PRC)? It is clearly not a place where newspapers, at least outside of the specially governed city of Hong Kong, can freely run editorials castigating government policies. Nor is it a place where opposition parties can be formed and operate openly. And yet, many people living in many parts of the PRC have a much wider range of choices when it comes to some aspects of their lives than during the Mao era (1949–1976). So how should it be categorized? And what should we make of it being a place where some kinds of protests are tolerated and others are not? These questions are hard to answer in part because China has become a country that confounds the standard frameworks for thinking about Communist Party-run states that took hold during the Cold War.

Consider, for example, this literary case in point relating to George Orwell. The PRC is sometimes referred to as an “Orwellian” state, due to things such as the way that speech is censored and those who hold or are suspected of holding politically challenging views are kept under surveillance and sometimes punished harshly. And yet, when Central and Eastern European countries were the main poster children for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-style Big Brother states, Orwell was

This essay's main body was written in 2011. Some citations have been added throughout to works published since that year and two brief epilogues have been added to bring parts of the discussion and my views on relevant issues up to date. A version of the first sections of this chapter has been published as “China and the Town Square Test,” *Protosociology* vol. 28 (2011): 173–86.

an author who could only be read in underground editions, and the states in question were places where writers daring to portray the current system in dystopian terms would be arrested and punished, or, if they held foreign passports, expelled. Yet a dramatic version of *Animal Farm* was performed in Beijing in 2002 without any interference by the state.¹ It has been easy for well over a decade to find copies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* openly displayed in both independent and state-run mainland bookstores.² In addition, after Chan Koonchang wrote a *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*-influenced dystopian novel, *The Fat Years*, which was set in a China of the near future and included plot devices meant to make readers think of the government's efforts to blot out the memory of the June 4th Massacre of 1989, he continued to live and work in Beijing. The Chinese edition of his novel, it is true, was not available for sale in mainland bookstores. It circulated openly only in Hong Kong and Taiwan. He did, however, sometimes give talks on *The Fat Years* in Beijing, though in English, one of many signs that the government allows more latitude when dealing with publications and presentations likely to reach only expats or relatively elite members of the domestic population.³

The questions introduced above are the ones that I will wrestle with in this essay, particularly the general one of trying to figure out how best to characterize the PRC of the early 2010s. Many scholars have addressed this definitional issue, including contributors to "China Since Tiananmen," a symposium that ran in the July 2009 issue of the *Journal of Democracy* and was published in part to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen protests and the June 4th Massacre. That collection included an essay that characterized the PRC of the twenty-first century as a place in which there is both "elite cooptation" and "concessions to prevent discontent from crystallizing into social movement" and governance by a "post-totalitarian regime ruled by a ruthless Party," and another article that characterized it as a coun-

¹ "The Play's the Thing: How Will the Party React?," *The Economist*, July 20, 2006.

² Michael Rank, "Orwell in China: Big Brother in Every Bookshop," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 11, issue 23, no. 2 (June 9, 2013).

³ Chan Koonchang, *The Fat Years*, translated by Michael J. Duke (New York: Doubleday, 2011).

try in which there is a protean and “still poorly understood new type” of authoritarianism in place, which “mixes statism with entrepreneurship, political monopoly with individual liberty, personalist power with legal procedure, repression with responsiveness, policy uniformity with decentralized flexibility, and message control with a media circus.”⁴

I have addressed the question of definition before myself in various ways, both in a contribution to that 2009 symposium⁵ and via various commentaries that emphasize the problems with viewing China simply through an Orwellian lens. I have argued since early in the twenty-first century that, when dealing with today’s PRC, we would do well to pay as much attention to Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (with its vision of soft authoritarianism rooted in satisfying desires, creating distractions, and encouraging apathy rather than fostering a climate of fear) as to Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.⁶ In some discussions of the PRC as a *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* hybrid, I have simply emphasized the interplay of different modes of control in Chinese cities, while in others I have stressed that repressive moves are more in line with Orwell’s notion of “boot-on-the-face” technique in some parts of the country (e.g., Tibet and Xinjiang) and more reminiscent of things Huxley imagined in others (e.g., Hong Kong).⁷

In what follows here, I only occasionally mention dystopian fiction, but I will come at the questions at hand in a way that is as un-

⁴ Jean-Philippe B  ja, “The Massacre’s Long Shadow,” *Journal of Democracy* vol. 20, no. 3 (July 2009): 5–16; and Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Impermanence,” *Journal of Democracy* vol. 20, no. 3 (July 2009): 37–40.

⁵ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Middle-Class Mobilization,” *Journal of Democracy* vol. 20, no. 3 (July 2009): 29–32.

⁶ See Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “China’s Brave New World,” *Current History* (September, 2003): 266–69, which in revised form became a chapter in my *China’s Brave New World—And Other Tales for Global Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007); and “Hot Dystopic: Orwell and Huxley at the Shanghai World’s Fair,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 20, 2011, which in revised and updated form appears as “Orwell and Huxley,” in *Eight Juxtapositions: China through Imperfect Analogies from Mark Twain to Manchukuo* (Beijing: Penguin, 2016). Other analysts of contemporary China, such as journalist Howard W. French and media specialist Jeremy Goldkorn, have emphasized Huxley’s relevance as well.

⁷ See, in particular, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, with contributions by Maura Elizabeth Cunningham, *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

conventional for an academic historian focusing on works of fiction. Namely, my window onto the issues here will be provided by a joke I heard during my first trip to China in the mid-1980s; a comment I heard from a bartender on one of my next visits to the country in the middle of the next decade; and my ruminations during subsequent forays across the Pacific on how the joke and the comment had retained their relevance and taken on different shades of meaning. I will return throughout the paper to the question of whether the joke and the comment still have relevance in twenty-first-century China, while also bringing in a variety of related issues, including the need, just alluded to above in regard to Orwell and Huxley, to think about how varied the PRC has become in terms of the political rules that apply in different parts of it, especially since Hong Kong was absorbed into the country in 1997.

The Joke and Its Limits

I have gone to China more than a dozen times in this century, for stays ranging from a few days to a few weeks. I have gone for different reasons (for conferences, for literary festivals, to do research) and had varied itineraries (sometimes I just go to Shanghai, the city I have studied in most depth, or Hong Kong, but other times I have stopped in multiple places). There are, however, a few constants. I talk to as wide a range of people as I can, both old friends and people I happen to meet, from people who sell newspapers at kiosks to taxi drivers to students and professors. I spend time in bookstores, seeing what kinds of things are on the shelves and what kinds of publications seem most popular with shoppers and browsers. I buy and read periodicals, watch television shows, and visit Internet cafés. When I do these things, I always think back to the joke I heard in 1986 (that I will retell below) and the time in 1996 when a bartender said that China had become a place where the watchword was: “Meiyou yundong, shenme dou keyi” (As long as there isn’t a movement, anything goes).

I use my trips to China to update my sense of the state of PRC culture and politics, treating these periodic on-the-field periods of observation (often of select urban settings where people are doing relatively well) to supplement the reading I do between trips that often

focuses on finding out what is going on in parts of the country, such as villages and frontier areas in the far west, that I rarely or never make it to when I cross the Pacific. Through this combination of visits and reading, as well as conversations with people I trust who live or spend time in China and do their own reading, I try to figure out what has and has not changed since the last time I visited, and what has and has not changed since my first three stays in the country: a year-long sojourn spent doing thesis research that lasted from the summer of 1986 through the summer of 1987 (during which I heard the joke); a one-week return visit for a conference in 1988 (during which the country seemed little different than when I had lived there); and a three-week stint as the “talking head” for an alumni tour in 1996 (during which I had my first sense of return visitor culture shock, triggered by a feeling that much had changed but in ways that were hard to pin down).

The joke that I keep coming back to in different ways involves two people, a boastful American and a Chinese respondent. It is one that I have since learned, from conversations with people who were living in Eastern and Central Europe at the time, was making the rounds in many different state socialist countries in the mid-1980s, with the only change being in the nationality of the person other than the American. When told in Hungary, the American’s interlocutor was Hungarian, when the joke was told in Poland, a Pole, etc. The version I heard went like this:

Boastful American: “My country is so free that I can go to a public square in the capital and shout out ‘Ronald Reagan is a fool,’ and nothing will happen to me. The police won’t even arrest me. Can you believe that?”

Citizen of the PRC: “That’s nothing to brag about. My country is just as free. I can go to Tiananmen Square and shout out ‘Ronald Reagan is a fool,’ and nothing will happen to me either. The police won’t even arrest me.”

When making return visits to China I have often asked myself if the joke is still relevant—assuming one simply substitutes a new President’s name for that of Ronald Reagan. This has served as my version of the “town square test” invented by Nathan Sharansky, the

Soviet dissident turned Israeli political figure who might well have heard a version of the same joke in Moscow in the 1980s that I heard in Shanghai, with Red Square in the place of Tiananmen Square. He describes this test, which divides nations neatly into those that are and are not free on what people can say and do in public, in *The Case for Democracy*.⁸ Soon after he wrote that book, George W. Bush, President of the US at the time, and then his close adviser Condoleezza Rice, sang the Town Square Test's praises.

Rice's comments on the test during the Senate Confirmation Hearings held to determine her fitness to serve as Secretary of State provides a good summary of Sharansky's idea. Rice said that the last years of the twentieth century had seen dramatic moves away from dictatorship and toward democracy in many parts of the world. As someone whose main area of expertise is Soviet studies, there was no doubt that the fall of the Berlin Wall and implosion of the USSR were among the main things she had in mind in asserting this. She went on to say that the new century might well see continuing moves toward democratization, but that there were challenges. This was because there remained "outposts of tyranny" where people were not yet free. Then, after saying that "America stands with oppressed people on every continent," Rice turned to the argument in *The Case for Democracy* and stated: "The world should really apply what Nathan Sharansky called the town square test. If a person cannot walk into the middle of the town square and express his or her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment and physical harm, then that person is living in a fear society. And we cannot rest until every person living in a fear society has finally won their freedom."⁹ Rice did not single out China as a "fear society" that continued to fail the "town square test," though she did place two of its neighbors in that category: Burma and North Korea. It seems likely, though, that she would have taken it for granted in 2005, as would many others in the West, that China had

⁸ Nathan Sharansky, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁹ "Confirmation Hearing of Condoleezza Rice," *New York Times*, January 18, 2005; <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/18/politics/18TEXT-RICE.html>, accessed August 1, 2012.

failed the test steadily throughout the Mao era and had continued to fail it in the Reform era as well.

My own conviction is that a simple free/fear dichotomy is problematic, and that China's current complexities show us clearly that there are problems with the town square test and, by extension, my humor-based variation on it, which sets up a divide between places where the joke being told in state socialist countries in the mid-1980s either works or does not work. Still, the town square and joke test can be useful starting points. We just have to remember that they are blunt instruments and nothing more, so I will apply them before going into what they obscure or oversimplify.

If we ask whether China is a country in which an ordinary citizen can go to Beijing's Tiananmen Square or other comparable settings, such as People's Square in Shanghai, and shout out comments that insult a top government leader, then the answer is no. If we modify this to bring in newspapers, which have long been one kind of text that helps shape a nation's public sphere (they arguably serve as a kind of print counterpart to the town square), then it is also true to say that publications sold openly near those same two central mainland plazas cannot run editorials or political cartoons attacking a national leader or a core policy of the Party. It should be no surprise, then, that the joke I heard in 1986 stills work in all Chinese cities other than Hong Kong in a way that it has stopped working in some of the other places it was being told at that time, such as Prague. (There may be places, such as Moscow and Budapest, where the joke stopped seeming apt for a time, but is now, due to moves back toward repressive government, uncomfortably relevant again; that issue is well worth considering but is beyond the scope of this essay.)

The joke test is revealing, but it encourages one to think that nothing fundamental has changed in China, aside from its economy being reshaped by a record-shattering economic boom and the country's rise in global status as evidenced in things such as its hosting of the Olympics in 2008. Each visit convinces me, though, that this is just not right. This is where the bartender's 1996 comment about the PRC becoming a place where nearly anything goes, as long as no organized movement is involved, has helped me work my way through issues of change and continuity. When I heard him say it in 1996, it clarified things I had been observing and it has been helpful to think about

anew each time I go back to the country. The next section will, after offering some background to the context in which I heard the comment, clarify what I mean.

The Bartender's Comment and Its Context

I met the bartender (whose name I never learned) during a trip that was not only my first post-1989 trip to China but also my first as a “talking head” specialist accompanying a group of travelers. I had steered clear of returning between 1988 and 1996 for a mixture of reasons. The main one was that I was in a period of transition that made crossing the Pacific difficult. I was adjusting both to life as a new father (our first child was born in 1989, our second in 1992) and to life as a new professor (I filed my thesis in the spring of 1989 and started my first tenure track job that same fall), so domestic travel was easy to contemplate, international travel harder.

There was another reason, though, for the long break between trips to China (much longer than the break between any subsequent visits), which had to do with the June 4th Massacre of 1989 and the political education drives and other signs of a clampdown on freedom of thought that followed. It was not that I was boycotting China, but simply that I found myself dreading returning to a country where friends might be much less open with me in talking about politics than they had been in the mid- to late 1980s, perhaps even try to avoid me due to propaganda that had presented the Tiananmen protests as riotous acts of “turmoil” for which nefarious Western ideas were largely to blame. I was also concerned that people I did not already know would be more anxious about the consequences of striking up conversations with an inquisitive foreigner than they had been when I was last in China. As I would learn, my worries were unnecessary—or at least by 1996 overblown (the immediate aftermath of June 4th may have been a very different story).

The country that I encountered in the 1990s, first during that fall 1996 visit and then a return one two and a half years later, was not one with a noticeably more tightly controlled public sphere than the one I had come to know during the 1980s. It was one that was in some ways, in fact, more open, though in other ways less. On the

one hand, there had been a heady feeling that China's political path was unknown when I was there in the 1980s, and this exciting sense of open-ended possibilities seemed gone by 1996. On the other hand, in spite of all I had read about the mood of watchfulness and even paranoia that had come in the wake of the 1989 crackdown, there were some ways in which people actually seemed less rather than more constrained in 1996 and 1999 than they had been in 1986 and 1988.

I was occasionally quite surprised during both those 1990s visits by how willing people were to discuss even taboo subjects in public or semi-public settings. One example of this came while I accompanied the tour group I was with to Tiananmen Square itself. The Chinese guide accompanying us that day, when asked why one area of the Square was sealed off, said that she thought it was because they were finally getting around to cleaning up bullet marks left over from the gunfire of 1989—an unexpected remark to say the least in a country where it was verboten to mention in any publication that troops had fired into crowds during the crackdown.

I was equally surprised in 1999 by something that happened right after I introduced two Chinese people to one another in Shanghai. One was an old friend from the 1980s, the other a new friend, and as soon as I had made introductions, they began exchanging and laughing together at the latest jokes they had heard mocking Li Peng, an official widely despised in intellectual circles who many considered more directly responsible than others for the decision to use deadly force against protesters in 1989. In the 1980s, I remembered, when jokes even as innocuous as the one about Ronald Reagan were told among Chinese people (at least when I was present), it was only when those present knew one another fairly well, or after time had been spent establishing a sense that they could trust each other. A dozen years later, the concern that a joke about an official might be repeated and the repetition cause problems, seemed to be gone.

It was after musing on this sense of things having changed in a way that was tricky to understand that the bartender made the comment that has stuck with me. When I began chatting with him at the bar, I had just given a public talk on Chinese history to a mixed crowd of mostly foreign travelers but also some domestic tourists who could follow a lecture in English. This had served a dual purpose: it was part of my job as a specialist whose trip was being subsidized by an alumni

association, and it was also billed as a form of evening entertainment by the cruise company. I had steered clear of obvious hot-button political questions, such as Tibet, but during the Q&A section some touchy topics had come up and I had dealt with them fairly directly, referring to things like opposition to the Three Gorges Dam project that was then in its early phase. I was told by one of the ship's foreign employees that a public security man had been in the audience throughout my presentation, but he had not seemed to care about anything I had said. It was when I brought this up to the bartender and also mentioned my surprise at the comment by the Tiananmen tour guide, that he said I should think of the current situation as one in which as long as there was no organized political "movement" (*yundong*) involved, "anything was permitted" (*shenme dou keyi*).

The rest of this essay will move between the implications of the 1980s joke about only being able to castigate foreign leaders in public still working in China, even though the bartender's comment points to much having changed. Or to put this another way, it will try to make sense of China becoming a place where it is now possible to speak and act in ways one could not in Central and Eastern European state socialist countries circa 1986, but where organized opposition is still off-limits.

Beyond the Fear State/Free State Binary

One problem for me about the town square test is that using it uncritically can sometimes serve to reinforce a common but flawed assumption that has informed many discussions of the period lasting from 1989 until the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. This is that those years marked a watershed point when countries governed by Communist Party regimes reached an important fork in the road, after which they all went in one of two radically dissimilar directions. Central and Eastern European countries went in the direction of freedom. North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, and China, by contrast, failed to change politically. The result was that they remained the same kinds of "fear" countries they had always been.

There are things I have seen—or not seen—on my post-Tiananmen trips to China that would seem to support this notion. I have

never seen marchers near People's Square or Tiananmen Square shouting "Down with Deng Xiaoping," "Down with Jiang Zemin," "Down with Hu Jintao," or "down with" any other top leader for that matter. And in those settings, I have never seen an openly published editorial or political cartoon criticizing one of the regime's core policies, such as Beijing's handling of Tibet and Xinjiang. In addition, I have seen clear evidence of another point made by the joke version of the town square test: the ability of American leaders to be criticized in China with impunity, indeed sometimes with official support. During my 1999 visit to Beijing, I was able to directly observe demonstrations targeting President Clinton, who was excoriated by marching students, during the first post-1989 youth protest held anywhere near Tiananmen Square (albeit not right in it). They lambasted him for what they saw as his culpability in the deaths of three Chinese citizens who lost their lives when a NATO bomb hit the PRC's Belgrade Embassy. Far from interfering with their actions, Chinese police watched them do this. I have argued elsewhere that there was genuine patriotic fervor as well as state manipulation involved and this bottom-up side of the event has sometimes been overlooked in Western discussions of the topic.¹⁰ Still, it remains true that the CCP tried to steer the protests and even provided buses to take students from some campuses to the locations of Beijing demonstrations held outside the American and British Embassies.

I have not witnessed any of the various anti-Japanese protests that have broken out since then, but I do know from following news about and seeing photographs of these events that what was true of the Clinton in 1999 has been true of Japanese leaders during demonstrations that erupted in 2005 and 2010: namely, Chinese people made comments and carried signs denigrating them that would have been cause for quick arrest, had the targets been domestic rather than foreign leaders. This was true of top French officials, as well, during the outbursts of 2008, which were triggered first by an Olympic torch carrier being roughed up in France and then President Sarkozy meeting with the Dalai Lama. The contrast between what Chinese protesters tend to be allowed to say about leaders of other countries, as opposed to what

¹⁰ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Student Protests in Fin-de-Siècle China," *New Left Review*, no. 237 (Sept.-Oct. 1999): 52-76.

they can say about those of their own nation, was noted in a caustic comment by the at the time very popular blogger Han Han (who is also a bestselling novelist and race car driver to boot): “Protests against foreigners by people who are not allowed to protest at home are utterly worthless . . . nothing but a group dance.”¹¹

In a related vein, in newspapers available for sale near Tiananmen Square and People’s Square, I have often seen editorials and cartoons criticizing core US policies in ways that Chinese ones cannot be criticized. On a July 2004 trip, for example, I picked up a copy of *People’s Daily*, which presented the US under the Bush administration as an evil octopus bent on encircling the globe with its tentacles. This image reminded me of a 1999 poster I had seen carried by a protester within a couple of miles of the same spot that presented the American eagle as a vicious beast encircling the globe with his talons. It is imaginable that something very like the *People’s Daily* cartoon and very much like the 1999 poster could have appeared on the Washington Mall without their carriers or creators being arrested. What remained unthinkable is that a Chinese citizen could get away with carrying a poster in central Beijing showing or a newspaper in that city could publish without being censored an editorial cartoon presenting the government of the PRC as an octopus with tentacles wrapped around Tibet.

Other experiences I have had in China in recent years, though, have undermined the notion of a simple divide between “fear” countries and “free” ones. Consider, for example, a late 2002 trip that found me moving back and forth between Hong Kong, which in 1997 became part of the Communist Party-run PRC, and the mainland city of Nanjing. This trip coincided with the holding of various meetings and ceremonies in Beijing, the goal of which was to mark a transfer of power from Jiang Zemin to a slightly younger group of CCP leaders headed by Hu Jintao.

¹¹ This line is quoted and analyzed well in Perry Link, “A Message Too Powerful to Stop,” *New York Times* (Global Edition/International Herald Tribune), September 29, 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/30/opinion/30iht-edlink1.html> ; accessed August 1, 2012; for more on Han Han, see Evan Osnos, “The Han Dynasty,” *The New Yorker*, July 4, 2011; and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Make Way for Han Han,” *Words Without Borders*, Nov. 12, 2012 <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/make-way-for-han-han> ; last accessed September 28, 2016.

In Nanjing, the coverage of the Beijing events was uniform—and uniformly celebratory and respectful. In Hong Kong, by contrast, variety and skepticism were the order of the day for the media. Editorials criticizing the outgoing and incoming CCP leader were published. One Chinese-language newspaper—the *Apple*, which admittedly was known for pushing the envelope—even carried a cartoon mocking Hu as a puppet who would have to dance to the “retired” Jiang’s tune.

Much has been made (with good reason) about threats to freedom of expression in Hong Kong in the wake of the 1997 handover, and a debate on that very subject was taking place on the pages of some of the former Crown Colony’s English-language and Chinese-language newspapers when I was there in November 2002. It was triggered by the announcement that a new sedition code might soon go into effect. Nevertheless, seeing things like the editorial cartoon just described convinced me that in 2002 at least, for all the talk of the dangers of self-censorship and Beijing’s political influence over the former Crown Colony’s press and politicians, the difference between Hong Kong and all mainland cities, when it came to what could and could not be expressed in very public ways, remained significant. And subsequent moves between mainland cities and Hong Kong from 2003 to 2011 (my trips during that period often began or ended in that southern metropolis) left me with similar impressions. In Hong Kong, for example, but nowhere else, newspapers, magazines, and books could still be sold openly in which the 1989 killings were referred to as a massacre. And in Hong Kong, though not elsewhere, books about Tibet that celebrated rather than denigrated the Dalai Lama could be displayed in stores. And so on.

Clearly, there are ways in which Hong Kong passes while Shanghai and Beijing fail the town square test—and, in my variation on the test, it is a place where the joke I heard in 1986 would fall as flat as it does in the capitals of countries once run by a communist party, perhaps flatter than in some of them, such as Putin’s Moscow. There are also other regional variations that come into play where the bartender’s comment is concerned. In Hong Kong, it is possible to take part in an organized movement. I also know, in this case from readings rather than visits (I have never been to either place), that in Xinjiang and Tibet the bartender’s phrase *meiyou yundong shenme dou keyi* just does not apply in the way it does in Shanghai and Beijing. Many things are

not allowable there that are not “movements,” as merely having a portrait of the Dalai Lama in one’s home, for example, can lead to punishment in Lhasa.

The case of the Dalai Lama’s portrait highlights another problem with the town square test: its tight focus on who and what can and cannot be *criticized*. It is also important to make room for consideration of who and what can and cannot be praised. Yes, it was dangerous in 2011 to go to a central square in Lhasa and shout out “Down with Hu Jintao,” but what was at least as significant as a signal of the particular type of repressive system in existence there was that it could be just as dangerous, indeed perhaps more dangerous, to go there and express your love of the Dalai Lama. And even in systems generally thought of as “free,” we should remember, the taboos against praising certain people or things, or otherwise expressing approval of them, can be as important as indexes of levels of freedom as taboos on who can and cannot be criticized. The most powerful symbol of McCarthyism was not a disappearance of the right to shout out criticism of the President, but to praise communism; in post-World War II Germany, a political cartoon mocking the current leader would cause one less trouble than one celebrating Hitler.

I also think that it is problematic to place too much of an emphasis on what cannot be done or said. There are other ways that repressive governments exercise power over individuals than through prohibitions. For example, in some cases, it may be less important what one *cannot* do or say than what one is *strongly encouraged to* or in the worst case scenarios *forced to* do or say. Here, dystopian science fiction and the literature on totalitarian regimes can both be helpful in clarifying our thinking. In the most repressive societies, real and imagined, it is often not the inability to criticize those in power and their policies in public that marks an extreme loss of freedom, but forced participation in loyalist rallies, where one must shout out designated slogans, or other settings in which active agreement with the authorities is required.

Totalitarian regimes—and this may be a key thing that sets them off from other types of authoritarian ones—do not simply wish to keep people from *dissenting*, but rather want to create a situation in which their thoughts will be altered so that they will not *want to* dissent or, failing that, will feel compelled to continually express their *contentment* with the status quo. In the world of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,

the government does not just want to prevent people from shouting out that $2+2=4$, but to get them to accept the regime's claim that it equals 5—and to express love of (not just refrain from criticizing) the Big Brother. Similarly, the most repressive actual polities have often been those in which people worry that failing to shout out an officially sanctioned slogan in a state ritual can be dangerous, something that, as a 2011 essay by Robert Barnett reminds us, is at present much more likely to be the case in Tibet than in many other parts of the PRC.¹²

These ruminations bring me back to the bartender's comment containing the term "yundong," which can be used to refer to organized campaigns directed from above as well as bottom-up ones that challenge the status quo. The Anti-Rightist drives of the late 1950s, for example, which created a climate of extreme fear in which people often felt that the best way to protect themselves and their families was to make public pronouncements of support for the government's effort to rid the polity of dangerous elements. I do not think the bartender meant to invoke the memory of those movements, but the words he uttered could be construed as having the meaning of "as long as there is no movement going on, things are okay" (*keyi* can signify things being all right). That is, the phrase could suggest a sense that people who in earlier parts of their lives had to endure being forced to show their loyalty might feel that things were better in a setting where being apolitical was an option.

One final thing needs to be brought into the mix: totalitarian settings of the worst kind are those in which people are punished not for anything they do or even anything that they fail to do in public. Rather they suffer because of private words and actions or simply because of *who they are*. In the darkest dystopias, real and imaginary, as Daniel Chirot has stressed, simply being born into the wrong group or being related to the wrong person (perhaps someone who makes a remark the regime finds offensive) can ruin your life.¹³ This is underscored,

¹² Robert Barnett, "China's 'Liberation' of Tibet: Rules of the Games," *New York Review of Books Blog*, August 22, 2011; <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2011/aug/22/chinas-liberation-tibet-rules-game/>; accessed August 1, 2012.

¹³ Daniel Chirot, *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

in the case of China, by one of the most moving short works of fiction ever written by someone who lived through the era when the CCP tried hardest to control private as well as public life. Entitled “Chairman Mao is a Rotten Egg,” the story focuses on a family’s fear that a casual utterance of the eponymous phrase could ruin the lives of all those connected to the child who said it.¹⁴

The China I found when I first visited the country in 1986 was a far cry from the nightmarish one portrayed in stories such as “Chairman Mao is a Rotten Egg”—and from the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* world of Orwell’s imagination. It lacked a free press and was under one-party rule, but it had become the sort of place where students could practice tennis by hitting balls against the base of the giant statue of Chairman Mao located in the university where I was based, which had been transformed from a shrine into something that was useful for pragmatic things (a main campus landmark, it was also a popular meeting spot for young couples). China was also, by 1986, a country where the distinction between what could be done in private and in public was much clearer (as evidenced by jokes making fun of leaders that were regularly told in dorm rooms by groups of friends who knew they would be taking a great risk if they told them in a public square). And it has changed considerably since then, moving at times back toward but often even further away from the worlds imagined in the Chinese short story and the British novel. There is also now, to complicate things still further, the Internet, which provides an increasingly important virtual “town square” where different modes of freedom and control exist and different rules apply when it comes to be what can and cannot be said—a topic that would need a whole additional essay to even begin to address. The PRC would have failed the town square test at each point before I set foot in it; it would have failed it while I was there in the mid- to late 1980s; and most parts of it would have failed the test during each of my trips back to the country in the final years of the last century and first decade or so of this one. Still, we would be very foolish to think that, because of this, the only truly

¹⁴ This story is included in Ch’en Jo-hsi, *The Execution of Mayor Yin, and Other Stories from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*, translated by Howard Goldblatt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

significant changes that have taken place in the last decades have been economic ones.

Epilogue 1: August 1, 2012

The first months of 2012 were unusually eventful ones for China, thanks to a mixture of headline-grabbing developments, from the purge of the charismatic Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, which made it clear that Xi Jinping would succeed Hu Jintao as head of the CCP, to the escape from house arrest of the blind activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng. In light of this, the following question became worth asking, when a chance came to review the pages written above for a 2011 conference: Did anything happen in the first half of 2012 that suggested the need to modify the arguments made the previous year? The simple answer is: No. But two short comments on 2012 are in order.

The first thing worth mentioning is the harsh judgment rendered against a man named Zhu Yufu in February 2012. He was sentenced to seven years in prison for “inciting subversion” in 2011 by writing and distributing online via Skype a poem inspired by the Arab Spring. The state’s punishment of Zhu was outrageous and spoke to a deep paranoia within the CCP leadership, which was already present before the Jasmine Revolutions of 2011 but became even more pronounced after authoritarian governments in Egypt and other parts of North Africa and the Middle East began to fall. The unjust way that Zhu was treated did not, however, contradict the main points made above, nor did other roughly contemporaneous moves by the state to curtail freedom of speech. This is because the strongest punitive measures continued to be taken against those whose words seemed in some fashion to be linked to action—or at least could be interpreted as having a mobilizing dimension to them. Zhu’s poem included the following lines: “It’s time, Chinese people! / The square belongs to everyone. / Your feet are your own. / It’s time to use your feet. . .” And as journalist Louisa Lim and I noted in a piece for the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* section, which explored the relevance and limits of Miklós Haraszti’s “velvet prison” concept for making sense of contemporary China, it “was most likely the perceived call to action . . . that sealed his seven-year sentence. Prosecutors at his trial presented the poem as

an effort by Zhu to ‘encourage Chinese to stage their own antigovernment protests.’”¹⁵

The second thing related to 2012 worth a mention is a visit that I made to a Shanghai bookstore in March of that year. I wanted to confirm that a Chinese translation of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was indeed still for sale openly in the PRC. I not only found that book displayed but also found translations of some other works that suggest just how different the publishing scene in China is to that anyone familiar with censorship in the former Soviet bloc might expect. Surely, if one or another Eastern or Central European Communist Party had remained in power after 1989, one book that would be banned from public sale, even if circulated widely in samizdat form, would be *The Open Society* by George Soros. And yet, a Chinese edition of it was not just available but prominently displayed in the Shanghai bookstore I visited, placed not far from a translation of Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Epilogue 2: November 13, 2017

The last five years have seen dramatic changes take place in China, which when taken together alter greatly the situation relating to many issues discussed above. These changes are due largely to the fact that, as expected, Xi Jinping became head of the CCP late in 2012 and then assumed the title of President of the PRC as well the following March. Initially, many analysts thought that Xi, the son of a comrade in arms of Mao and Deng who had been associated with drives toward liberalization late in his life, would be either a colorless status quo maintain-

¹⁵ Louisa Lim and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “The Gray Zone,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2012; available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/books/review/how-chinese-writers-elude-censors.html?_r=1 ; accessed August 1, 2012. The classic statement of the “velvet prison” concept is, of course, that found in Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). The best extended discussion of Haraszti’s relevance for China remains that in Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

ing figure, much like his predecessor Hu Jintao, or someone who, as the son of a liberalizer, would move the country at least a bit toward openness. In fact, he has turned out to a charismatic strongman figure and anything but a liberalizer. He has also, especially after this month's 19th Party Congress ended with his name being added to the Constitution (elevating him to a sacred status similar to that previously enjoyed only by Mao and Deng), become the focus of a personality cult reminiscent of the sort China has not seen in decades. In Xi's China we have been seeing the contracting of many of the zones of freedom that had begun to expand very gradually during the mid-1990s and early 2000s. We have also seen a shift away from the sort of *meiyou yundong*, *shenme dou keyi* environment described earlier in this chapter, back toward one in which people need to be watching their words and actions much more closely.

The last five years have been difficult ones for many specific groups, including rights lawyers, feminist activists, members of international NGOs, and labor organizers. There has also been much greater pressure put on intellectuals: not just dissidents but also ones striving to adopt critical stances toward some government policies without embracing wholesale oppositional positions. Xi has taken a stronger line toward Hong Kong, which has become a site of increased activism in the last half-decade, than Hu did. The already stringent controls on Tibet and Xinjiang have become even more intense, and Xi has moved to limit even more than his predecessors did the flow of information into China via the Internet.

It is important not to overstate the disjuncture between the pre-Xi era and the one over which is presiding and on which he has put such a personal stamp. Some trends now underway, for example, can be seen, with the benefit of hindsight, to have begun as far back as 2007 and 2008. It is also worth guarding against slipping into viewing today's China as an undifferentiated police state (there is still much that one can do with impunity in Shanghai that one cannot do in Xinjiang) or a country with no zones of freedom at all (newspapers in Hong Kong can still run political cartoons mocking Xi's policies). There are also still bookstores on the mainland that carry Orwell and Arendt's works, and, surprisingly, it was after Xi came to power that a Chinese translation of *The Velvet Prison* began appearing in some of these establishments as well. Still, had I begun writing this chapter in

2017, a year that saw Liu Xiaobo become the first Nobel Peace Prize winner since Nazi times to die in confinement, rather than in 2011, it would have been a much darker piece. This is due to phenomena already mentioned and also to other things, such as the persecution of some Hong Kong booksellers linked to the publication of gossip works about the misdeed of top CCP officials, and the central authorities passing a law that makes it possible for someone to be sentenced to a three-year prison term simply for being disrespectful during the playing of the national anthem.

This said, I continue to see the discussion above of contrasts between late Mao era patterns and those of different parts of the Reform period as valid—even if some of the points I presented as referring to China’s “current” situation now feel as though they apply to a period quickly receding into history. One question far too big to grapple with in a short section such as this is whether we need to think of China as having moved from the Reform era to a post-Reform period, and, if so, when exactly this transition occurred. Xi claimed at the 19th Party Congress that a glorious “New Era” for China had begun. My feeling at this moment is that he is probably right that something that deserves to be called a “New Era” is indeed underway, but that, when it comes to issues of freedom as opposed to other things such as China’s status in the international order and the country’s overall wealth, it is proving anything but glorious.¹⁶

It is too soon to tell what novel political jokes this “New Era” will inspire, but variations on the old one used to introduce this chapter began making the rounds in China in the wake of Donald J. Trump’s recent stop in Beijing. When the American President was in being feted in Beijing, not only did censors continue to take their usual stringent measures to prevent the dissemination of material mocking Xi, but they also worked hard to sweep social media sites clean of posts

¹⁶ For more details on recent events and the concept of a shift between eras, see Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Maura Elizabeth Cunningham, *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Carl Minzner, *End of an Era: How China’s Authoritarian Revival is Undermining Its Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Simon Denyer, “China’s all-powerful leader should heed the lessons from history, former official says,” *Washington Post*, November 11, 2017.

and images that were disrespectful toward Trump. These are usually allowed but at the moment were construed as having the potential to imply that there was something wrong with the way the Chinese authorities were celebrating Trump during his visit. It seems fitting to end this chapter with the translation of a joke provided by the China Digital Times website, which tracks issues of censorship and control in the PRC:

American: "We can discuss our president on our social media platforms. Can you?"

Russian: "Of course, we too can discuss your president on our social media platforms."

The American drew the lesson, then went off in search of a Chinese person.

American: "We can discuss our president on our social media platforms. Can you?"

Chinese: "Of course. We can discuss your president on our social media platforms."

American: "You should go give it another try."¹⁷

An Early November 2018 Postscript

During the months leading up to this book's publication, there were new reports of developments in various parts of the PRC that underscored the sense that tighter and tighter control in all parts of the country is the order of the day under Xi Jinping. The most important of these early- to mid-2018 reports have detailed the proliferation of indoctrination camps in Xinjiang, in which hundreds of thousands and perhaps around a million Uighurs are now held. Other notable recent stories include the following two: a Shanghai resident disappeared mysteriously after a video circulated on the Internet that showed her splashing ink on a photograph of Xi, and a party associ-

¹⁷ "‘No Question’ Presser Marks Trump’s Visit," *China Digital Times*, November 9, 2017; available at <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2017/11/no-question-presser-weibo-censorship-mark-trumps-state-visit-plus/>.

ated with calls for Hong Kong to be independent has been outlawed, something that had not been done previously to any political organization in that territory. These and other recent reports reinforce the idea put forth in my second epilogue above that the PRC has entered a dark phase that is giving the old joke about what can be said in the public square renewed valence and making the bartender's phrase less and less apt.

EPILOGUE

MARK LILLA

Political Innocence and Its Modes

“I did not know.” For a good century this phrase has been the mantra of apologists for tyrants and fellow-travelers of totalitarian movements. “I did not know.” And for nearly as long, those alert to the crimes of communist and fascist regimes, third-world despotisms, and now Islamist movements have ridiculed this excuse. And they had a point: documentation of most of these crimes was available to anyone eager to know the truth. It took an extraordinary lack of curiosity, self-absorption, and willful blindness not to see what was perfectly obvious: in Russia, that the Moscow Trials were staged executions and that peasants were starving; in China, that the Cultural Revolution was an auto-da-fé as mad as the French Terror; in Cambodia, that people were being driven out of cities to their deaths; in Iran, that homosexuals were being strung up from lamp posts. Anyone who wanted to know, knew. Those who did not know, did not want to.

So why did they not want to know? For as long as modern tyrannies have been with us, so has this question. And two sorts of explanation for political self-deceit have been put forward. One is social. It focuses on intellectuals as a class that has particular biases, commitments, and blindness. Julien Benda spoke of *la trahison des clercs*, Milovan Djilas identified the “new class,” Raymond Aron sniffed out the opium of the intellectuals, and the idea of an “adversary culture of intellectuals” was put forward by Daniel Bell and others.

Though I have always been sympathetic to these writers, I have never been terribly satisfied by these sorts of social theories. And for the same reason that I am skeptical of reducing human motivation

to class interest or bias: there is simply too much variety within any class. It is true that the so-called herd of independent minds rushed to support disastrous revolutions and charismatic despots throughout the twentieth century. But a lot of them also resisted the totalitarian temptation, or simply changed their minds. You will not get far trying to understand that temptation if you treat the intellectuals as a homogeneous class sharing a common outlook.

A second sort of explanation of political self-deceit focuses on the connection between totalitarianism and religion. This argument has a longer pedigree, running back to the counter-revolutionary thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, who blamed the Terror and its intellectual defense on atheism. T.S. Eliot, if I understand him correctly, also held this view. A different, and to my mind more persuasive version of it, had been first put forward by Dostoyevsky. He saw atheism itself as the expression of religious despair, and revolutionary passion as a perverse displacement of messianic longing. This approach became particularly popular after World War II, when it was common to speak of revolutionary movements and parties as ersatz churches, revolutionary thinkers as ersatz theologians, and political self-delusion as a correlate to religious self-delusion. Here I'm thinking of Eric Voegelin, Gershom Scholem, Czesław Miłosz, Leszek Kołakowski, Isaiah Berlin, and Jacob Talmon.

I have always had sympathy for this view and still think it gets us closer to understanding why totalitarianism was so attractive to so many intellectuals. One reason it does is that it connects the dynamics of political life with the psychodynamics of individuals, not classes. And the parallels are striking. Just as the religious ideas of sin, conversion, divine authority, providence, and redemption can cause the individual believer to deny the evidence of his eyes, so can the political ideas of exploitation, revolution, the party, class struggle, and emancipation. My book, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), tried to make explicit how these two sets of ideas were connected in modern German thought.

Since finishing the book, though, I have begun to feel that this approach is insufficient. It has become clear to me that in trying to explain political self-deception I left something out—something simple but important. Those of us who write about messianism and modern politics are all, in one way or another, trying to explain the extremes—

how appalling crimes could have been committed, and then justified by those aware of them. What we have not taken seriously enough is the possibility that, for certain types of intellectuals, the crimes might genuinely not have registered as crimes. Not that these intellectuals were lying or acting in bad faith, as many did. But that certain sorts of modern intellectuals are—for deep, not superficial reasons—constitutionally incapable of grasping the complexities of evil. That they are, in a word, innocents.

What is innocence? And what, in particular, is political innocence? In the Christian world, innocence is a virtue, though not a simple one. Christians—and, I would argue, post-Christian, Western cultures like ours—are self-divided over its value. Jesus was often surrounded by children, and told his disciples: “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter into it.” (Mark 10:14–15)

That is one Christian voice on innocence. In St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, though, we hear a different voice. In recounting his life story, Augustine says that as a child he was never morally innocent, and that no children ever are. He was a selfish infant, demanding milk at all hours of the day and night, and crying when he did not get it. And as a young boy he stole some pears just for the fun of it, and threw them away rather than eating them.

Christians all agree that man was originally innocent, then fell into sin. But they disagree about what should follow from this fact. Are the faithful, with God’s grace, meant to recover their original innocence and see the world again as the children at the feet of Jesus did? Or should they accept the fall, see it as a fortunate one, and develop the faith of self-aware adults? Throughout Christian intellectual history one hears both voices. Augustine’s own view was that there’s no going back to Eden—and that that is a good thing.

In the United States it was Reinhold Niebuhr who saw most clearly how this double-mindedness about innocence had shaped the Christian political imagination. Niebuhr was an Augustinian, who drew from Augustine’s doctrine of sin the principles of a lucid realism in political affairs; he had no illusions about man’s propensity toward evil and saw political force and authority as imperfect tools for controlling it and preventing the worst crimes. He hoped for the best and pre-

pared for the worst. But Niebuhr also knew that he was in the minority. The Christian Churches of the twentieth century, especially in the United States, were still under foolish illusions about the nature of evil, the perfectibility of man, and the illegitimacy of force. Christians were by and large political innocents—and politically innocent people are more dangerous than they might appear. As the Catholic novelist Graham Greene once put it, “Innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.”¹

The Christian ideal of innocence has cast a long shadow over our post-Christian culture. Leszek Kołakowski got it right, I think when he suggested that the more remote the Christian concept of sin became in modernity, the more politically innocent intellectuals as a class also became. This deserves some reflection. As Czesław Miłosz reminded us in *The Captive Mind*, very different human types were attracted to totalitarian political movements or apologized for them, and each had different reasons for doing so. I propose to look at the innocents, who come in two types. Let’s call one type the Billy Budds, the other type the Prince Myshkins.



Billy Budd is an angel incarnate. He is a professional merchant sailor who is always popular on his ships, something between a leader and a mascot. All his mates love Billy and follow his example instinctively. So, when he is drafted into the British navy and put on a ship called the *Bellipotent*, Billy does not complain; he assumes it is a ship like all other ships, manned by men like other men. But it is not: it is a war ship, full of sailors and officers whose job it is to kill. They face evils every day and sometimes must commit them. They are not angels.

The master-at-arms of the *Bellipotent* is Mr. Claggart, a man Melville calls “naturally depraved.” He takes an instant dislike to Billy, for the sole reason that natural goodness offends him. So Claggart contrives with another sailor to entrap Billy by offering him money, which Billy refuses. The other sailors see what is going on and warn Billy that Claggart is after him, but he refuses to believe them. He defends Clag-

¹ Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (London: Penguin, 2004), 29.

gart because the master-at-arms is always so nice to him—which, on the surface, he is.

Frustrated by his inability to entrap Billy, Claggart then denounces him to the ship's captain, Captain Vere, saying that Billy is planning a mutiny. When Vere calls Billy in and asks him to explain himself, Billy cannot speak—he is struck dumb at the very idea being falsely accused. The Captain does not know what to think, so he calls in the accuser Mr. Claggart, who then denounces Billy to his face. Billy stares and stares—and then strikes, landing a blow to Claggart's head that kills him instantly. According to the rules of war, Billy must be executed; and he goes to his death without complaint. His last words as he is about to be hanged are "God Bless Captain Vere!"

I was reminded of Melville's novella *Billy Budd* recently when I was rereading *Political Pilgrims*, Paul Hollander's classic study of intellectuals and modern totalitarianism. It is a strange experience reading the book now, thirty years after it was first published, and twenty since the collapse of the Soviet Union. On page after page we read the most extraordinarily naïve, delusional travelers' accounts of visits to regimes we all recognize as despotic today.

Some visit Stalin and are struck by his avuncular love for his people; others spend nights arguing philosophy and literature with Castro, and come away mesmerized. Others still wax poetic about the social harmony achieved under socialism, and seem to believe that writers and other intellectuals are actually freer under it. The socialist economy is another wonder. Where André Gide saw fear and empty store shelves when he visited Russia, most others saw jovial families and economic plenty. Or at least a gayer sort of economic misery. After making his visit, American novelist Theodore Dreiser wrote, "In Moscow there is poverty. There are beggars in the street. But, Lord, how picturesque! The multi-colored and voluminous rags!"²

And the prisons! I am not sure whether travelers to communist countries were taken to prisons as a matter of course, or whether they asked to visit. But they all seemed to be astounded by what they found. How humane, how many books in the libraries, how happy the prison-

² Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981), 111.

ers look! "In Russia," George Bernard Shaw wrote after taking a tour, "the prisoner enters as a criminal type and would come out an ordinary man but for the difficulty of inducing him to come out at all. As far as I could make out, they could stay as long as they liked."³ Many pilgrims believed when they were told that there was a waiting list of people waiting to get into some prison. This was either an absurd lie, or it was a sign of just how hungry the population was.

Now Shaw and Dreiser were anything but Christians in the conventional sense. And they certainly had no trouble recognizing and denouncing evil: they denounced capitalism and democratic party politics at every turn. What they apparently found impossible to recognize was the totalitarian wolf in the clothing of an innocent lamb. Like so many fellow-travelers and apologists, they minimized the suffering under totalitarianism because they had lost all sense of moral proportion. There could be one evil that must be resisted and one evil only, they thought; there could not be two. How could a force that combated evil also itself be evil? There was, I think, a naïve Christian innocence behind all of Shaw's Nietzschean posturing.

And when professing Christians did visit totalitarian regimes, what did they see? From Quakers in Russia to Philipp Berrigan in Hanoi, the clergy saw what they hoped to see: the Kingdom of God being built on earth. One typical remark comes from the English Quaker D.F. Buxton after he visited the Soviet Union in the 1920s. He wrote: "In the emphasis they place on the spirit of service, the Communists have taken to heart some of the most important maxims of the New Testament. They repudiate, of course, the language of religion, but their actions are so much more important than their words that I do not feel we need take the latter very seriously."⁴ An American Quaker, Henry Hodgkin, said roughly the same thing after visiting about the same time: "As we look at Russia's great experiment in brotherhood, it may seem to us that some dim perception of Jesus's way, all unknown, is inspiring it."⁵

Billy Budds like these, innocent as lambs, were extremely useful idiots for all the tyrants of the twentieth century, from Stalin and

³ Ibid., 146.

⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵ Ibid., 124.

Mao, to Tito, Ceaușescu, Castro, Pol Pot, and Khomeini. Some of them eventually lost their innocence, at least when it came to communism and third-world revolution, and many of these wrote confessional books about their political conversion. But it is worth remarking how many of those innocents then remained true to character once they became anticommunists, striking out violently once their illusions vanished, a little like Billy Budd. Someone could write an interesting book some day—or perhaps someone already has—about radical ex-communists and how little their characters changed after the scales fell from their eyes. From James Burnham and John Dos Passos in the 1930s, to 1960s radical David Horowitz today, we are confronted with human beings who switched political sides but remained just as incapable of understanding the moral complexity of political life and the polymorphous perversity of evil. Credulity and a fist is all they're equipped with.



Prince Myshkin has returned to Petersburg. He has just spent four years in a Swiss mental hospital, suffering from epilepsy and the human condition; neither were cured. But while he was there he had an epiphany that made him want to return to life and do some good. In a small village not far from the asylum, the Prince met a young girl who had been ostracized by everyone, including her family, for having lost her virginity. She was alone and constantly abused by the village children. Myshkin felt pity stir within him and decided to help. Above all he took it upon himself to convince her young tormentors that they should pity her, too. And, in fact, through speech and example he did manage to restore their natural sympathy. And when the girl died not long thereafter, she was surrounded by innocent, loving children, just like Jesus was. They had been reformed.

Prince Myshkin returns to St. Petersburg as a self-appointed messiah: he believes anyone and everyone can be redeemed. This is why he becomes immediately interested in Natasya Filippovna, another “fallen woman” he meets shortly after his return. He becomes obsessed after hearing her story from someone else, and becomes convinced he knows how to save her. The reason she is bad, he believes, is that she has suffered and now loathes herself. What his experience in Switzerland

taught him is that there is no such thing as sin, really, just suffering; and the moment we relieve suffering, the impulse to do wrong disappears.

And so Myshkin pursues her. She flees into the arms of a seemingly bad man, Parfyon Rogozhin, and debauches herself further. Then she returns to Myshkin. This cycle is repeated several times until Myshkin proposes marriage, in order to save her. Natasya accepts the proposal—but on her wedding day she again runs off with Rogozhin. Driven mad by love for her, and wanting to keep her from Myshkin, Rogozhin kills Natasya. The Prince pities her, and pities Rogozhin, too. Finally, unable to bear all this pity, he is led back to the asylum.

The Billy Budds of political life find it hard to recognize evil and cope with its complexities. In their innocence, they celebrate the unspeakable. The Prince Myshkins of political life are not quite so naïve. They recognize that we live in a fallen world—but also believe that, with enough effort, we can overcome the effects of our fall. They are, speaking theologically, Pelagians. Prince Myshkins assume that all political evil is the product of suffering, and see political action as either increasing or decreasing suffering in the world. Good politics is a missionary activity.

Now, a good number of liberals who have no illusions about totalitarianism also believe that politics is a missionary activity. What sets the Prince Myshkins apart is that they commit themselves to a certain notion of redemption, in which they have an unshakeable faith. Myshkin believes that Natasya can be made good and happy if only she is loved enough. He is wrong: Natasya is too far gone to be good, and certainly too wounded ever to be happy. And clearly Myshkin's doggedness only increases her suffering. Yet he persists in the belief that he is right—and brings about her death. And along the way makes many other people who love him suffer as well.

What redemptive love was to the fictional Prince Myshkin, redemptive revolution was to the political Prince Myshkins of the twentieth century. At times they could be quite lucid about what was happening in the communist orbit. Yes, what happened to the Kulaks was wrong, just wrong. Yes, the five-year plans were bogus. Yes, the Great Leap Forward was a human disaster on an astonishing scale, caused by the whim of one megalomaniac. Yes, intellectuals and dissidents in Cuba are being censured and jailed for their views, which is not at all what the revolution promised. And, yes, the boat people who

fled Cambodia were fleeing hell on earth. We recognize all this, the Myshkins say, and we denounce it.

Their lucidity, though, always came after the fact. Whenever any new revolution began, the Myshkins could always be counted on to support it. The readers of my generation or older will remember what it was like trying to argue with revolutionary enthusiasts of this type. Mistakes were made in the past, but this time will be different, we were told—over and over again. The Soviet Union was a just another Russian despotism, which imposed its power on helpless Easter Europe—agreed. China is China and always will be China, and Mao is just another cruel emperor—agreed. Neither regimes are truly revolutionary forces, and neither give hope of emancipating the human race. In Europe, only Yugoslavia has a chance—maybe.

But look elsewhere and you will see a hundred points of light. Something is stirring—in the jungles of Southeast Asia, on the savannahs of Africa, in guerilla cells in South America and the Levant. The flesh may be weak, but the spirit of revolution is still strong. Like characters in a Beckett play, our political Prince Myshkins spent the 1960s and 1970s waiting for the right revolution to come along. They were serial innocents, unwilling to contemplate the possibility that all these failures pointed to the failure of the idea of redemptive revolution itself. For them, “the revolution” was a moveable feast.

Then the feast ended, when the boat people fleeing Cambodia and Vietnam started drowning in the South China Sea, and opponents of Ayatollah Khomeini were seen swinging from the lamp posts of Teheran. The last European Prince Myshkin was Michel Foucault, who rushed to Iran not long after the revolution and wrote wildly enthusiastic articles, mainly for Italian newspapers, about what it meant for human emancipation in the future. He was met with a barrage of criticism by liberal Iranians, especially women, wherever he went. Foucault returned chastened and never wrote about politics again.



But Prince Myshkins are always to be found in the United States, most recently the “liberal hawks” who were so prominent in the early 2000s. These people fascinate me, especially those who were radicals in the 1960s. Over half a century they made a long march: from faith

in the revolutionary ideal in the 1970s, to skepticism in the 1980s, to reconciliation with liberal democracy, despite its problems and limitations, in the 1990s. But after 9/11 they reverted to type, celebrating the revolution that this time, they believed, really would emancipate the human race: the democratic revolutions then thought to be stirring in the Arab world.

These innocents turned out to have learned nothing. They actually believed that liberty and justice really could be brought to all, down to the last tent in the last village in the last desert. They forgot everything we have learned in the past few decades. That nations cannot be built where people do not see themselves as a nation. That family-trumps-clan-trumps-tribe-trumps-state in much of the world, and that a police uniform does not a citizen make. That democratization empowers the *demos*, not just the bloggers. That the *demos* hates the powerful and never forgets humiliations, real or perceived. And, most importantly, that revolutions always provoke reactions.

Very little remains of the so-called Arab Spring that was likened to the storming of the Bastille. The hopes for democracy in that region have been dashed again. But we still have trouble admitting that the social preconditions simply are not there, and will not be there in our lifetimes or those of our children. What happened instead is that some of the nations that rose up against one despot found themselves under worse ones, in Syria and Egypt, in particular. People there must be wondering whether it was all worth it. And we should be wondering the same thing, since we still find ourselves in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Does this mean that these revolts did not deserve our admiration and support? No. Or rather, it depends. It is impossible not to be stirred by the rhetoric of freedom and human rights; but we need to remember that this rhetoric does not always inspire the practice of freedom and the defense of human rights. If twentieth-century history has taught us anything, it is that. Moreover, in those parts of the world where traditional sources of authority, legitimacy, and order still operate—especially religious sources—they will play a large role, and *should* play a large role, at least in the short term. We in the West can only be spectators to this drama, and to think otherwise—to think that somehow, despite our recent history with the Arab and Muslim world, we can play a “constructive role”—is pure fantasy. All we can sensibly do

is follow the rule of St. Augustine and his modern disciple Reinhold Niebuhr: hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

I hope that is the basis of future American policy in the region. But I do not have much hope that it will be the basis of discussion among American political intellectuals, who still seem pretty evenly divided between Billy Budds and Prince Myshkins. They never seem to learn, and others pay the price. This situation was captured perfectly by the English writer Elizabeth Bowen in her novel *The Death of the Heart*, where she writes: "Innocence so constantly finds itself in a false position that inwardly innocent people learn to be disingenuous. They exist alone. . . . Incurable strangers to the world, they never cease to exact a heroic happiness. Their singleness, their ruthlessness, their one continuous wish makes them bound to be cruel, and to suffer cruelty. The innocent are so few that two of them seldom meet—when they do meet, their victims lie strewn all round."⁶

⁶ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 133.

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